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BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

WHISPERS.

A VOLUME OF LYRICAL POEMS,

BY

ROBERT HARBOROUGH SHERARD.

Printed on Special Dutch Handmade Paper, and
bound in Parchment.

PRICE SIX SHILLINGS.

REMINGTON & CO.,

134, NEW BOND STREET, LONDON, W.

A BARTERED HONOUR.

A *Novel*.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY

ROBERT HARBOROUGH SHERARD.

VOL. III.

Quae medicamenta non sanant, ferrum sanat,
Quae ferrum non sanat, ignis sanat.

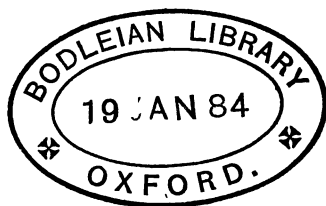
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A BARTERED HONOUR.

CHAPTER I.

CHARLES IS ARRESTED.

WE left Charles grinding away at the review, which at the orders of his employer, the editor of the *Clapham Mercury*, he was preparing on the book of poems by James Mangles. Grinding, aye, for no work is less sympathetic to a man, himself an author, who, wishing to be just, has to review the work of a contemporary. We find him six hours later burning the midnight oil over his unfinished task. He had finished his critique on the "Cherry Leaf," and was now entering upon the "Will-o'-the-Wisp" department. It need hardly be said that these *poems* were not worthy of the name of poems, or anything but imbecile and weak strings of rhymes, which were often no rhymes.

In the first part of the book the author had imitated Swinburne, in the second Wordsworth. Charles had little sympathy with the poetry of the Lakes. In his mind, and to his thinking, poetry, the hand-maid of music, ought to appeal to the

higher senses and not to the reason, should charm but not weary, intoxicate but not fuddle. Philosophical studies he had always avoided; to him philosophy seemed a big note of interrogation, which never got an answer, or like the eight-armed pieuvre, ever stretching out new feelers without ever attaining anything, and thus fruitless and discouraging and wearying. Poetry should not breed weariness, he thought, and as the poetry of Wordsworth seemed to him here to convey botanical *memoria technica*, there metaphysical theses, he eschewed Wordsworth and his followers.

It was therefore with some weariness that he entered upon the second part of the book, prefaced by the author—

TO WILLIAM WORDSWORTH,
Who "uttered nothing base,"
THIS DEPARTMENT (*sic*)

is

DEDICATED

By the AUTHOR.

The first poem, "The Blooming Daisy," he passed over—it called for no comment. The second, third, fourth and fifth were on the well-known topics "On Seeing a Puppy Wag his Tail," "The Dying Swan," "On Receiving a Musical Box from a Young Lady of Eight," "The Penultimate Rose of Summer," "The Baby's Awakening." The sixth, however, took his attention. It was a set of rhymes to Mildred M—, composed at Sorrento, and as amatory as a writer of Simple

Poetry could, consistent with the rules of his art, indite.

The first verse will suffice to show what the "singing bard" could do in the way of poetry, and prove that James Mangles-Peebles-Mangles had cast an eye of passion on Mildred Merton.

Oh, Mildred,
Who from o'er the seas,
Didst, wafted
By the zephyr breeze,
To me, Britannia's
Lowly son,
To be of happiness
My sum
To me, the singing bard,
Didst come.

"Poor Herbert," said Charles, flinging the book into a corner and bringing his review to a hurried close, "is this fellow, who has marred my life, to step in your path also; for I know that you love Mildred, and that Mildred loves you."

Then, with a head aching and ringing with the rhymes dinned into it, the young reviewer went to bed.

Evil dreams were his that night, tho' evolving from bright fancies. He thought he was once more wandering through the Silent City, that it was eventide, and all the skies were aflame with rosy light, that once more he stood in the deserted ruin of the temple of Venus, that once more, with trembling hand and swelling heart, he plucked a handful of wild flowers and laid them on the stone, whilst his lips breathed forth the name of Euphrosyne, that she came blushing from behind a marble pillar and took her place by his side.

before the crumbling stone, and put her arm round his neck, and laid her head upon his breast, and that they were both too happy to speak, but that their pure and sweet souls went forth into the rosy air like two white doves, and fluttered in the sky. That they stood thus watching them, what time seemed to him an eternity of bliss; that suddenly a hideous bird of prey leaped from a recess and with croaking voice and flapping wings darted on the two symbols of their love, and drove one one way the other another way into the night, and that Euphrosyne, clinging tightly to him, wept for the havoc done, that he was caressing her, when a mighty black hand pushed him away from her arms, and a voice cried, "Go bastard, go pariah, the pure are not for thee," and that he fell down and prayed that the burning lava, and the cinders, and the dust, and the fire, and the whirl-wind might come upon and bury him and his aching heart as of yore they buried the site where he lay.

It was but a dream, and yet the sorrow of it clung to him when he woke, for

Dreams in their development have breath,
And tears, and tortures, and the touch of joy;
They leave a weight upon our waking thoughts.

He turned round feverishly, and saw on the table by his bedside a letter from Florence.

Letter from Euphrosyne de Bienaimée.

"MY DEAREST CHARLES,

"I have just come back from the country, and have found all your dear letters

waiting for me. They made me very happy and yet intensely miserable. Intensely miserable because from them I see that you are still in ignorance of what has happened to me. I asked Bianca to write to you and tell. I had not the heart to. And then, how cruel things are, you never received the letter, and I must write, though I would rather die than give you one moment's pain.

"O, darling, to think that all this month I have never had an hour's peace, never a quiet night, never any calm, while you were in ignorance of my suffering. All the time, and most when I felt most desolate, I had a slight solace in the thought that you too were grieving, and my stricken soul seemed to go forth and meet yours in sympathy.

"*Diletto mio*, must I tell you? It is now thirty long days since my troth, plighted to you in all love and in all sincerity, has been broken, and well-nigh my heart too, by my mother. I am engaged against my will, against my nature, against my very life, to the man, whom, like a foolish child, methought I once loved.

"Need I tell you how it all came about, need I lacerate your heart, dear heart, by telling you all I have suffered, and the farce I have had to play in? The public announcement, the white dress, which now lies in a thousand tatters, trodden beneath my feet, the congratulations, his kiss upon my cheek, which I have struck since then a hundred times, in anger and shame at the thought that he had kissed me, when you, you, you alone

have the right. For never will I be any man's but yours, never shall another kiss me save you, *sposo mio*.

"I have been but a child. I used to think that there was no suffering here, that all was so beautiful that no one need be unhappy. I never knew of tears, of tears that burn the eyes.

Io non pensava che lo cor giammai
Avesse di sospir tormento tanto,
Che dall'anima mai nascesse pianto ;
Mostrando per lo viso gli occhi morte.

"But now I know it, and now I feel it, and now, an I could, I would lie down like a tired child

And weep away this life of care.

"I love you truly. That you are unhappy, that you are an outcast, makes you more precious to me, for being unhappy, I would make you happy, and in my bosom the outcast should be at rest.

"And what think you are the noble motives that impel this man, whose honour you saved, to persecute me? What think you are the motives of my mother? She, because she knows I love you, and because in her pride of family she thinks you an inferior, and he, because he has again wasted his fortune, and my dowry will retrieve it, drive me to a sacrifice of feeling, honour, life. Life, for I will not, I can not now live without you.

"Either write to my mother and tell her that you have found that your birth and your parents are irreproachable, or come to Florence and take me away. I would leave all for your sake, and wander

away with you, even to the greatest poverty. I know no poverty, having your love.—Heart of my heart, *addio*.

“Ever, ever your loving,

“EUPHROSINE.”

Charles got up, dressed quickly and ran out into the street.

“The nearest telegraph office?” he cried addressing a passer-by.

Directed to it, he ran off, entered the office, and dashed off the following telegram :—

“MADEMOISELLE DE BIENAIMÉE.

“Florence.

“Will come.

“CARLO.”

He had scarcely finished this hurried missive and was handing it to the clerk, when two men accompanied by a policeman entered the office.

“There he is, there he is,” cried Luke Bennett, who was one of the party.

“Yes, that’s ’im,” cried Snorker, the other.

“Officer, do your duty,” said Mr. Bennett.

The policeman advanced, and roughly laying his hand on Charles’s shoulder, said to the astonished and wildly indignant young man—

“Bill Kedges, I take you into custody.”

“What for? are you mad?” said Charles.

“What for?” cried Luke Bennett, “what for? For stealing my watch on board the Southampton steamer, last year. Ah, young man, evil deeds always find you out.”

"Ah, that they do," said Snorker, and reverently turning up the whites of his eyes to the ceiling, added "for which 'evin be praised."

"Now then, no nonsense," said the policeman, "come along. You've got to come with me."

"I have got to do nothing of the sort," said Charles, thrusting the officer aside. "This is the most preposterous affair, my name is not William, nor can I claim any kindred to the Kedges' family. You have made a mistake, or are playing the fool."

"Come," said Luke Bennett, advancing, "you can't deny having seen me before."

"I do not deny it. I met you on board the steamer from Hamburg."

"There," said Snorker, turning to the policeman, "he confesses all."

"I do not deny," continued Charles, "having met you, I can further say that I knew your watch was stolen, and sold immediately after the theft, and I charge that fellow who is with you with that theft."

"Oh Lor!" said Snorker, "the imperence of the feller."

"Look 'ere," said the policeman taking hold of Charles. "I know nothing about all this, wot I know is that I have to take you into custody, by force if required, and bring you up before the magistrates, so come on."

What Charles might have done is not certain, for he was so angry at the occurrence, and so upset by the letter he received, that he had lost

all control over himself, and would most probably have acted very prejudicially to himself, had not an old gentleman, who formed one of the crowd which had now gathered in and about the office, given him the very sensible advice to go quietly, and prove his innocence before the magistrate. Charles recognised that this was his best plan and allowed himself to be escorted to the station, whence he was presently brought before the bench of the Clapham magistrates, charged as Bill Kedges with having feloniously stolen from the person of Mr. Luke Bennett, a gold watch value £100.

Without listening to his explanations, the magistrate, who appeared to recognise in him an old and frequently punished offender, took the depositions of the prosecutor and his witness, and remanded the prisoner for one week, in order to give time to the prosecutor to bring the pawnbroker who had bought the watch from the prisoner, into court. Mr. Snorker stated that they should have no difficulty in so doing, that the pawnbroker was well-known to him, and was of the name of Barlow.

Charles was accordingly remanded. Bail was not allowed, indeed the prisoner did not ask for it. The love of adventure was a ruling passion in him, and then, as a writer, he wanted to gain as much experience as possible of all things, and was rather interested in the part he had to play.

He went to prison, but what was his distress,

when, being searched, the crumpled telegram was found in his pocket. He had not been able to send it, and had forgotten it during the scene in the post-office.

Poor little Euphrosyne !

CHAPTER II.

ESTHER'S STORY.

THAT evening Mr. Bennett received two messages, one from Italy, a telegram, and a note from Clapham.

The telegram ran as follows:—

“J. G. BENNETT, Esq., Lincoln's Inn, London.

“Add £200 to the reward offered for the discovery of Esther Lovell.

“HERBERT LOVELL,

“Sorrento.”

The note came from Clapham police-station, and ran—

“DEAR SIR,

“You can help me now—I am in prison, on remand, on a false charge. Will you come and see me?”

“Yours,

“CHARLES HAUBERK.”

(Benson.)

To have seen the worthy little barrister after he had finished reading the two epistles one would certainly have judged him to be suffering from a relapse, and a very severe one, into the brain fever he had undergone.

Leaping bodily into the air, shouting, clapping

his hands, laughing, then seizing "Brougham's Common Law" and flinging it at an old bust of the late legal Blackstone, boxing his office boy's ears, and then condoning the offence with the presentation of a shilling, running about his chambers as if undecided what to do or where to go first, he represented rather an inmate of Dr. Phillipot's establishment than a member of so serious a corporation as the Honourable Society of Lincoln's Inn.

"By the powers," he cried, when at last, exhausted by the violent and irregular exercise in which he had indulged, he sank into his chair. "By the powers, the very moment I was beginning to despair I find them both. Now all that is wanting is"—

"Miss Esther Lovell," said the office boy, showing in a lady, and grinning at his employer, who, however, sat with his mouth wide open, and apparently having lost all confidence in his ears and his eyes. "Miss Esther Lovell, sir," said the boy again.

"Yes, yes, William," said Mr. Bennett, "very good, I thank you. You may retire, William, and close the door, William. To what, madam," continued the barrister, turning with the same vacant look to his visitor, "to what am I indebted for the honour of your visit?"

"I have come to"—said Esther.

The vacant look on Mr. Bennett's face changed suddenly to one of astonishment. He at last realized that he was once more sitting face to face

with the person he had so vigorously and industriously searched for, and leaping to his feet he cried, "Why, are you Esther Lovell?" Then running to the door he locked it, drew the key, placed it in his pocket, and returned to his seat. Esther kept quite quiet, and waited for the barrister to speak.

Mr. Bennett, after feasting his eyes on her for some time in silence, rose, and ever keeping watch on her, walked backwards to the desk where he kept his papers, opened a drawer, and taking out a huge bundle of papers, labelled "Hauberk"—"Lovell," returned to his seat, and arming himself with a pen and about a ream of assorted stationery, addressed the lady.

"Will you allow me a few questions?"

"Yes."

"Your name is, I believe, Esther Lovell?"

"My maiden name was so."

"Your maiden name, exactly. You are the daughter of the late Rev. John Herbert Lovell, of St. Peter's Port, Guernsey, and of the late Millicent Lovell, his wife?"

"Yes."

"You have, or had, a sister called Dora?"

"Yes."

"Your parents died while you were very young?"

"They did."

"You removed from Guernsey after their deaths and went to live with an uncle in Broseley in Shropshire."

"We did."

"Your sister Dora did not get on very well with this uncle. They used to quarrel?"

"I believe so. I can hardly remember."

"Still you can remember how it ended?"

"Yes."

"It was thus. I will read you that paragraph of your history, and if you can correct me I shall be obliged. You, Esther Lovell, were a posthumous child, and your mother died giving birth to you. Your sister Dora, who was fourteen years old when you were born, and you were then placed with some relatives of your mother who lived in the island. . When you were two years old you were removed with your sister to the house of your uncle, Stanley Lovell, who used to live at Broseley; with him you stayed one year. Your sister Dora, then nearly seventeen, could not agree with this uncle, and one night, after a violent quarrel with that gentleman, she came into your room where you were sleeping, and taking you from your bed dressed you and, carrying you in her arms, fled from the house. She took you to London, and you lived there in great poverty. How you were maintained you cannot, of course, know, but you may perhaps remember that one night after you had been six months in London your sister came home accompanied by a gentleman"—

"How can I remember it?" said Esther nervously, "I was only three and a half years old."

"Accompanied by a gentleman, who kissed

Dora and then kissed you, and called you his little sister. Next day you left your miserable lodging, and accompanied by this gentleman and your sister you went a long journey, to Scotland, in fact. There you all lived together in a pretty little cottage in a village near Kirkoswald, in Ayrshire. When you were more than four years old a boy was born to your sister. Shortly after his birth you all took another long journey, back to England, to a splendid country house in Leicestershire, called Appledean Manor. You lived there some time. The gentleman was not quite so kind as he had been, and he and Dora used to quarrel. One day they had a very violent quarrel, and Dora ran away from Appledean, taking you with her. After that you went to"—

"Ah, you know no more," said Esther, with a little tone of triumph.

"Oh, but I do," said the lawyer calmly. "After that you went to London, and went into lodgings in Richmond, where soon another little boy was born. You then left Richmond and went to?"—

"Note of interrogation," said Esther.

"Partly," said Mr. Bennett, smiling, "might I suggest America? New York?"

Esther was silent.

"I will be frank with you," said Mr. Bennett. "I do not know any more. I want you to tell the rest."

"I cannot."

"But you must."

"I cannot. I don't remember. I only remember

being at New York, and what you tell me about my childhood I learnt from my sister."

"What became of that sister?"

"I don't know."

"When did you see her last?"

"I don't remember."

"Why give me all this trouble?" said Bennett, rather testily, "I know where to find her, or at least the son who was born at Richmond."

"Herbert?" cried Esther.

"Yes, he is in"—

"London!" cried Esther, rising. "Oh, let me go."

"No, not in London, I wish he was. See, read this telegram."

Esther seized the telegram, and read its contents with the most marked excitement, then she said—

"Well, and why have you been offering rewards for me. Do you want to prosecute us?"

"Prosecute you? No. Oh, prosecute, oh. Ah yes, perhaps."

"What, for running away?"

"Perhaps."

"But you can't."

"The law can do many things."

Esther looked anxiously at the barrister, then rose, and walked about the room. She said—

"I know you of course. I recognized you at the Grosvenor. I remember seeing you at Apple-dean. You gave me a ride on your knee. Then, when, you spoke about Lord you know, I could

not help remembering you. You were a solicitor then, you are a barrister now. But I did not come here to talk about that, or to tell you anything about my sister; it is years since we saw each other. I come to tell you of a foul plot that is going on, and to ask you to help me, because I want to help the dear lady who helped me."

"Not that little old lady who hid you away from me, and has given me all this trouble to find you?"

"Yes, she hid me away because I begged and prayed her on my knees to do so. I did not want to see you."

"Why not; were you afraid?"

"Yes. I did not want all that old affair to come out. It was a dead secret that wanted no resuscitating. I owed that to Dora and her son, because, if it had all come out, her peace would have been destroyed, and then, and then, I had been wicked and foolish, and I did not want my past to come out either. I don't want it now, and I warn you I will tell you nothing about her. My story I will, because it will help you to clear up the matter I refer to."

"What is it?" said Bennett, rather impatiently, "I have very little time to spare."

"Look here," said Esther, handing him the letter she had received from Snorker. "The dear lady loves Benson, and I want to save him."

Mr. Bennett seized hold of the letter with an excitement which contrasted vividly with the in-

difference he had previously expressed, and having mastered its contents, and taken a copy thereof, he jumped up and looked at his watch.

"Too late," he muttered, "it is too late to go down to-night. Here, William, run to the nearest telegraph office, and send a message to Bill Kedges, Clapham Common Police Station, saying I will come to-morrow morning."

Then as the boy darted off to execute the commission, he called out —

"No, no, I'll—" but it was too late. Then he put his head between his hands, and said, "I almost wish I had never had anything to do with it. It is so complicated, and so troublesome, and so many fresh difficulties arise everywhere, that I feel almost unable to unravel the affair, and were it not for the promise I gave to a dying man, I would run away."

Turning to Esther, he added rather irritably—

"And now, young lady, what have you given me all this trouble for? I have spent several hundred pounds looking for you. Why could not you come forward before?"

"I have told you why, it is just because I did not want the past to come out, for my sake and my sister's sake."

"And you came now?"

"To tell you of this plot, directed by a pair of scoundrels, against someone who is dear to the kind lady who helped me so nobly."

"Yes, yes. I see the plot. These two fellows have got hold of the secret and want to work it to

their profit. But you know who they are, and will tell me."

"I will, my condition being that you do your best to help this Benson."

"I will, of course."

"Well, when I left New York, after quarrelling with Dora, I went as a governess to the children of a rich merchant in X. where I stayed for two years. During that time I became acquainted with a gentleman, a Mr. White, a merchant, who asked me to marry him, and whom I married. I lived happily with him for some time, and had a daughter, a dear, dear little girl."

Here Esther broke down, and could not proceed for some time. When she had recovered, she continued—

"But after her birth, my husband, instead of being kinder to me, changed very much. He used to leave me all day alone, and very often all night too. I felt very dull and any companion was welcome to me. It was thus that I did not repel the advances, which, at this time, one of the partners of my husband's house began to make to me. He knew how to make himself very agreeable, and, though at first I was disgusted and frightened at his appearance, in my loneliness any companion who would treat me kindly was welcome. Another thing served to get me into this scoundrel's power. Mr. White, a most hard-headed business man, was very chary in supplying me with money for house-keeping, and yet was most exacting that everything should be nice, and even luxurious. I was thus

often in difficulties in money matters, and most foolishly borrowed from time to time from the scoundrel I speak of. Well, I will not enter into details, suffice it to say that one day, maddened by the reproaches my husband had heaped upon me for some trifling omission on my part, and, feeling myself utterly compromised, and quite in the power of the man, I consented, my heart breaking, and half mad with shame, to leave my home, and flee with this man. We came to England and travelled about Europe. I then learnt that this scoundrel had stolen a large sum of the firm's money, and had abandoned his own wife in the most heartless manner. At Monaco we made the acquaintance of another ruffian, the fellow whose letter you have read. They used to frequent the tables, with the usual result. My seducer lost everything, and sold all my jewels and even my clothes, but this money was lost too. Then they engaged in a forgery, and swindled a firm of bankers at Marseilles out of a large sum, which went to the tables, and remained there. When I heard of this last villany, I resolved to stay with them no longer, but fled. I reached England after a series of adventures and sufferings which I will not relate, and lived in London some time on a little money which I had reserved, foreseeing the time when I should have to part with the man who had worked my ruin.

"I had been in London some months when I met him again. I followed him and found his address, and wrote to him to come and see me.

My reason for doing so was to beg him to marry me, for I had seen in the American papers that my husband had divorced me, and that his wife, poor woman, had died. This interview took place, and we parted after a bitter quarrel. The cur refused to do me justice, and told me he was married. It was a lie. I know that now, and knew it then. I struck him. I'm glad of that."

"I can supply an account of what you did next," said the barrister, who had listened with great interest to her narrative. "After your interview with this man you fled from the house, leaving this locket."

"Ah," cried Esther, "that locket. How did you get it?"

"I got it from the people, on paying a small sum you owed. They bear you no ill-will."

"Heaven thank you, sir. I have regretted few things so bitterly as having had to rob those wretched people. The woman was so kind to me that my heart bled to think I was deceiving, robbing her."

"There was no deception or robbery," said the barrister kindly. "The pledge you left was worth twenty times the debt. Please continue your narrative."

"Twenty times!" cried Esther, "twenty million times; it encased in the days of my innocence—in days, which when compared to these latter ones seem but bright dreams engendered by a maniac brain—the portrait of my child, my fair-haired darling. You want to hear the sequel of my story.

When I had crept, feeling like the meanest wretch alive, out of the poor house which had sheltered me so long, I found myself in the street, penniless, hungry, ill-clad, and not knowing where to go to. I wandered about this great city all that day, and not a morsel passed my lips. That night I slept with other outcasts under a railway arch. The next morning, famishing, and more dead than alive, I began to wander again. I had no plan to follow, no object, all I wanted to do was to get away from the river, from the cold muddy river, which seemed to draw me to it with irresistible force, and bid me take in it a refuge from all my sorrow, all my shame, all my remorse.

“That night I met him again, and, in my suffering, my bodily want and pain having deafened all the dictates of my pride and hatred, I, yes I, actually clung to him and begged of him, were it but a crust of bread. Cruel wretch, he flung me from him with a blow, and I fell utterly exhausted and bleeding from the head into the muddy gutter. There he left me, and there I should have been left, had it not been that there are some kind hearts among mankind. A little old lady, a timid little body from the country, scared and bewildered at all the noise and bustle, jostled and hurried by the crowd, a little old woman, simply clad, wearing spectacles, with hardly enough courage to cross the road, or to make her way among all the passers-by, such a one, I say, took pity on me, and, braving scorn and ridicule, had me borne, filthy, bleeding, horrible to look at, from the

gutter of London, into one of its proudest hotels. There I met you, and thence, on that account, I fled. She took me to"—

"Burton Row, Westminster, to a Mrs. Rebecca Martin's, where you were visited by a man giving my name, the name of John Bennett," put in the barrister.

"Ha," said Esther, "you have tracked me well. The man was none other than that scoundrel."

"You have not yet named him," said Mr. Bennett.

"It were difficult. His name changes every month. His real name is Milwaukee Bartholomew, and his most frequent alias is"—

"Bartlemy Hiram," cried the barrister. "By God, I see it all now. What an accursed fool I have been!"

CHAPTER III.

A TRAP FOR BARTLEMY.

"Yes," said the barrister, turning to Esther and apologizing for the vehemence of his language, "I have been a fool. I myself told my story to this man, and he is now working it to his profit. It was in order to keep Charles Benson away from me that he has engaged in this affair and had him arrested."

"Who is Charles Benson?" asked Esther. "You seem to know him."

"Charles Benson is Charles Hauberk—your sister Dora's son."

"What?" cried Esther. "Then the boy lived!"

"Yes. Your nephew is alive."

Esther looked at the barrister for a long time in silence. Then she said—

"Why have you taken all this trouble? Can you repair the mischief? Can you undo my sister's shame? What reparation can you bring?"

"Time will show," said the barrister. "I may be able to repair many things."

"You can never undo this treachery. You cannot recall the past."

"I do not say. There are so many difficulties in my way. I have so long neglected the matter that the work is very great now. That confounded illness upset me, and for many years drove all sane

ideas out of my head. Well, I will not talk of this now. Finish your story."

"I will," said Esther. "As you know, I went from the Grosvenor Hotel to Burton's Row, and there I was persecuted by Hiram. He came to tell me that he knew my sister's story, and threatened to publish it abroad if I did not promise to be silent. You see he had reasons to fear me, who knew of his villanies, of his embezzlement and forgery. I wanted to spare my poor sister, and so I was silent, but I tasted a little revenge even then, and, woman though I am, I beat him like a dog. He left me alone then; but I used to be visited by his accomplice, Snorker, who professed to love me, but with whom I had only one matter in common, and that was hate for Hiram. I lived on in London, earning my bread by copying for authors; at that time I first saw your advertisements. I recognized your name, and knowing that you knew our past I hid from you. At last work failed, and I was once again cast into the streets. This was two or three months ago. I was in great fear lest my poverty would bring me into the hands of the authorities, and that my name becoming known you would find me out. I thought of the river again, but was saved by a new villany on the part of this Hiram. For reasons known to himself, which you will probably be now able to recognize, he wished me to be put away, and, acting through Snorker, tried to get me shut up. Snorker came to me and told me that his 'pal' had commissioned him to get me locked up in a lunatic asylum,

and urged me to yield to his advances and leave London with him. I refused, of course, and told him that I should be glad of any refuge. I accordingly acted a part, and he, seeing no alternative but to obey Hiram's orders, availed himself of my compliance, and having told me to act in a certain way, had me taken up before a magistrate, and, with the testimony of two hired doctors, swore to my insanity. I played my part well, for my own purposes, not for theirs, was sent to a lunatic asylum, the Peckham Lodge Asylum, which though a private establishment, receives a certain number of pauper patients free of charge. I was very glad to have a home at last, anything was better than the streets or the charity of the two scoundrels, and there I was quite safe from you, for I feared you, perhaps foolishly. I was there till yesterday night, when I learnt that Hiram had committed a fresh villany, and that his second wife was also confined in the same house. I do not know what his motives were, they were assuredly bad ones, for I think it must be because she has money and he wants to get it. Anyhow I managed to see her. Fancy, it was the sister of the dear lady that took pity on me, but not a bit like her though—spiteful and cross, as she well may be, poor thing, shut up there and married to him."

"The infamous scoundrel!" put in Mr. Bennett.

"Aye, an infamous scoundrel. Well, from her I learned that this Charles Benson, spoken about in a letter I had received from Snorker, was a love

of Dorothy Crosthwaite's. I then resolved to escape and come to you, and in return to get you to help me to save this Charles and also to rescue Dorothy's sister. There, now you know the long and short of it."

Mr. Bennett rose, and lighting two candles, for it had grown quite dark now, placed them on the table.

Then bidding Esther wait, he hid his face in his hands and remained thus lost in thought for some time. At last he looked up and said—

"Tell me what became of your sister."

"That I can—that I will not," said Esther.

"How absurd you are," said the barrister irritably. "Why should you put difficulties in my way when I have more than enough already? I tell you I mean harm neither to you, nor to your sister, nor to her sons. On the contrary, I might benefit you largely, and it is to do this that I ask you."

"I tell you again I do not know. I did not write much to Dora after I left New York. I do *not* know where she is now. You say you have found Herbert; he will know, he will be able to tell you."

"Why, of course," cried Bennett, starting to his feet; "what an idiot I am. But my poor head and my poor memory."

Then, seizing his hat, he rushed to the door and unlocked it, passed out, locked Esther in, and ran in haste downstairs, into the street, and to the nearest telegraph office open for night service.

There he sent off the following message to Herbert Lovell:—

“MR. HERBERT LOVELL, Sorrento.

“DEAR SIR,

“Have found Esther, and now want to find your mother. If with you, bring her to England. Most important.

“J. G. BENNETT.”

Meanwhile Esther had been holding commune with herself. Her only object was to be revenged on the man who had ruined her, and who had brought her from a comfortable home to the streets, from the tender caresses of a darling child to the rough buffets of the harsh, unpitying world. It was with this object in view that she had come to Bennett, and with no other, save the minor one of in some measure clearing off the deep obligation under which she rested to the “little old lady.” She was fully resolved to be silent about her sister, for she did not know what might be the lawyer’s motives in wishing for information. She knew that he knew about her sister’s connection with the Earl of Brookshire, and about her flight from Appledean, and Esther had vague notions that this flight might be punishable, and, though herself she dreaded no punishments, she did not wish to cause her sister or her sister’s son, the dear friend of her youth, to suffer.

“What can it all mean?” she said, as she paced up and down the chamber awaiting Mr. Bennett’s return. “What does he want with us?”

So the other boy lived. All live, even I who would so gladly rest. Ah, rest."

Mr. Bennett's hurried entrance interrupted her reverie. Turning to him, she said—

"Now once for all, sir, tell me what you want with me, and what you want with Dora, and what you want with us all, and what you are going to do, and what is the object?"

"That I cannot just yet. I must have you all together first, and then I will speak, and then I will act."

"All together?" cried Esther. "What? Are you going to bring me face to face with Dora, with Herbert? Do you forget my shame?"

"Tush!" said Mr. Bennett, impatiently. "Your sister and nephew ain't ogres. What you did was wrong, I don't deny that, very wrong perhaps, but then it was greatly your husband's fault, and still more the fault of that reverend gentleman whose little games will receive a sudden check, and sooner perhaps than he thinks."

"Say that again," cried Esther, her eyes brightening. "Say that again. Say that you will trap him, expose all his evil doings, and punish him, and you will make me happy. Happy, if I can ever be so again."

"Certainly I am, and first I want you to give me the name and address of your husband's firm."

"That I will not."

"Then the name and address of the bankers at Marseilles, to whose prejudice he and his confederate committed the forgery you spoke of."

"I will—stay, it was the Credit Bordelais, the Marseilles Succursale."

"Can you explain the nature of the fraud?"

"I think so, it was a common forgery. Bartholomew forged the signature of the Count of Belmont to a cheque for a large amount on this bank, and Snorker presented and cashed it."

"Was it not detected at the time?"

"I do not know. When Snorker returned to Monaco with the money, and I learned the nature of the proceeding, I, as I have already told you, left them and fled, but I think the answer to your question is plain. They cannot have been detected since they are about England."

"No, you are right. Of course not, then this is the means of punishing these two scoundrels."

"Yes, yes," said Esther.

"Now leave that to me," said the barrister, "and do not be afraid that I shall spare them. A man who has injured Esther Lovell, and is attempting to injure Charles Hauberk, and worst of all a man who is trying to outwit John George Bennett, has very small claim on my considerations. Leave that to me. But now I want to speak about you. What do you propose to do? You say you have no means. Where will you go to to-night?"

"Oh," said Esther, wearily. "Now that you have promised to do this for me and Dorothy, I care little for the rest. I will go back to Peckham Lodge. I shall be welcome there."

"You will do nothing of the sort," said Mr. Bennett with emphasis. "No more disreputable

adventures for Esther Lovell, if you please. You must accept a loan from me."

"A loan," said Esther. "You mean a gift."

"No, no, a loan. Soon you will be rich."

"How so?"

"Wait and see. Stay," said the barrister, after a moment's reflection. "I know. There is that Mrs. Carter, who keeps a family boarding-house in Palgrave Square, a dear kind woman, who would make you very comfortable, and then," he added to himself, "I can get Brother Luke to look after her and see that she doesn't run away again. Yes, yes. We'll go to Palgrave Square."

Esther assented, and in a few minutes found herself in a cab, by Bennett's side, driving to Palgrave Square, and reaching it, she was set down with her companion before a nice-looking house, the family boarding-house kept by an excellent old lady, a Mrs. Carter, who was on very friendly terms with Mr. Bennett. This gentleman made all the necessary arrangements, and asked Mrs. Carter to buy Esther any clothes or necessities she might stand in need of.

Leaving Esther in the charge of this lady, Mr. Bennett took his departure and made his way to the house occupied by his brother, Luke Bennett.

He found him in, and in the company of his other brother, Robert Bennett, the physician, who attended Esther at the Grosvenor Hotel.

They were sitting together at the dinner-table, drinking their port, and talking of this and that.

As the barrister entered the room he heard the word "Bill Kedges."

"Who is Bill Kedges?" he said, stepping forward.

"Ah, John, is it you?" said Luke, rising. "You old fox, you never come near us now, and Bob, too, he says you seem to have forgotten his existence. Here, sit down, and take a glass of port. It is not bencher's port, I know, but generally appreciated by poor mortals."

"Thanks," said the barrister. "I know I have neglected you sadly, dear brothers, but you know I am fearfully busy, and am getting my case into splendid order."

Luke looked at Bob, and Bob looked at Luke and they both smiled significantly.

"I came here to-day," said the barrister, "to ask you, Luke, to look after a young woman I have placed in Mrs. Carter's house opposite, you know. I particularly want her to stay there, and she has strange impulses at times and runs away."

"Does she affect your case?" said Bob Bennett.

"Very much," answered the barrister. "Very much indeed. So, Luke, if you would not mind calling there once or twice a day, and asking Mrs. Carter how Mrs. White is getting on, I should be obliged. If any bad news is given, you must wire it to me at Lincoln's Inn."

"All right," said Luke, winking at Bob.

"I know you think me mad, Luke," said the lawyer, who had noticed the wink, "and you are

not the only one of that opinion. You know that cursed brain fever of mine, Bob, paralyzes me still at times, and makes me quite powerless at moments. But what I am doing now is no piece of folly."

"At least," said Luke, "I hope you're not out of pocket by it. I suppose you'll get your expenses paid."

"You wretched old business man," said John Bennett, laughing. "Always with your eyes on the main chance. My expenses were paid long ago. But look here; when I came in you were telling Bob about a young man called Kedges; what was it?"

"Oh," said Luke, "a young scoundrel who stole my watch—the watch, you know, given me by his Grace; a long time ago it happened when I was returning from Hamburg. I had him arrested, and he is now in prison on remand."

"Where?"

"At Clapham."

"At Clapham; it is the same."

"Same what?"

"Same young man. Look here, Luke, you must not go on with this case."

"Why not?"

"The young man is not Bill Kedges at all. He is Charles Hauberk."

"Yes, so he said, but who is to believe him. Thieves are always swells if one believes them. If I had as many pence as Veres, Montmorencys, &c., have been had up, I could buy up London."

"But, Luke, I tell you it is absurd. This young man is a gentleman, I know him. He is the son of Lord Hauberk, the Earl of Brookshire, my old friend. How could he steal a watch? What can make you think so? What proof have you?"

"Not much, certainly," put in Bob Bennett; "and that is what I told Luke before you came in. He spoke to the young man for a few minutes on the deck of the steamer, and shortly afterwards missed his watch."

"Yes," said Luke, "and never thought so well-spoken a young man could be a thief, especially one so high and mighty; but the swell mob are always high and mighty, and this one looked an old fish, I must say. Still, had not Mr"—

"Snorker," said John Bennett, "told you that he was the thief, you would never have believed it, eh?"

"John!" cried Luke and Bob together, "how can you know?"

"Oh, well enough," said the barrister, with a smile of triumph. "I know the whole story. Look here, you two listen to me."

Then, in a few words, the barrister explained to his brothers the whole matter, and so clearly that Luke had no longer any doubt on it. When John had finished, Luke jumped up and said—

"The infernal scoundrel! I will have him arrested at once; and that poor young man, too, he must be got out at once."

"No, stay," said John, "don't do that. That

would spoil all. Leave the matter to me. We must keep this case on for another week or ten days. You must not betray anything to Snorker, or show any signs of knowing what he is about."

"Why so?"

"Because if you did I should lose sight of the pair. They would manage to escape. I want the warrant from Marseilles, and that will take time to come. I have not even written to the Credit Bordelais. Don't you see?"

"Yes."

It was then agreed that Mr. Luke should still keep up his friendly intercourse with C. Snorker, Esq., and proceed with the case against the infamous Bill Kedges.

CHAPTER IV.

BILL KEDGES IN PRISON.

TRUE to the promise contained in his telegram, Lawyer Bennett made his way early the next morning to Clapham Common, and presenting himself at the police station, found, as a legal adviser, no difficulty in getting access to the felonious Bill Kedges.

Charles was seated in his cell occupying himself with writing—what? A last confession? No—a poem on Euphrosyne. Other MSS. lay strewn on the little table before him, and proved that he had not wasted his time. These MSS., written since he was confined, were chiefly notes on prison treatment, reports of conversations he had had with the officials, and a draft of the defence he proposed to offer when he was again brought up before the Bench; for although he had not yet been twenty-four hours in durance vile, he had had quite enough of this new experience, and rather regretted not having at once given the necessary proofs of his innocence, from doing which, it will be remembered, he had purposely abstained, in order to gain the experience which was now growing irksome to him, and more than irksome, for he fumed and chafed at being unable to communicate with Euphrosyne, whose letter was causing him the greatest anxiety.

When Bennett, then, entered the cell he found Charles writing. Instead of at once advancing, the lawyer stood in the doorway, with his eyes rivetted on the young man, who, busy in his poem, and with his mind probably in Sorrento, did not notice that anyone had entered.

"The very picture of the old lord," said Bennett to himself; then stepping up to Charles, he said—"I have come, Mr. Kedges."

"Oh!" said Charles, without turning round, "all I want is to ask you to see that they don't put drunken men in the cell next to mine. I could not sleep a bit last night, and have been much annoyed this morning also. There is one thing more," he added, "my name is not Kedges, but Hauberk—a slight difference."

"You are right," said Bennett, bringing his hand down on the young man's back with a cordial slap. "Your name is Hauberk, and your face is Hauberk."

Charles turned round, and seeing Mr. Bennett, jumped up and said, "Oh! I beg your pardon, sir, I thought I was speaking to the master of the place. You are Mr. Bennett, I suppose?"

"Yes," said the lawyer, "I am."

"I got your telegram," said Charles, "and thank you very much for coming. I wrote to you because, perhaps you remember, you gave me a card at the Oxford Railway Station, saying"—

"That I knew your father," put in Bennett, "and would be glad to serve his son any time, or in any way."

"You knew my father. Did you know him well?"

"Yes, very well. We were friends—aye, friends and that is a boast that very few men can make, for Lord Hauberk was as proud as he was noble."

"Proud," cried Charles, "I am glad he was proud. He was very great, was he not?"

"Aye," answered the barrister, "very great. There are few, if any, like him to-day. He was a true old Tory nobleman, and that is a race that is extinct now-a-days."

"Extinct?" cried Charles. "Why, most noble-men are Conservatives."

"Yes, Conservatives. That word expresses the matter exactly. It expresses a sort of compromise, a wish to be popular, and yet selfish. There is no longer that strong independence, that defiance of classes which they despised, which used to mark the Tories of your father's time. But," he added, "that is not the question. I have come down to talk to you about different things, and the first thing is about this watch. No, don't speak; I know the whole business. It is only a plot, and I have my hand on the plotters, and shall crush them by-and-bye, but I want time, and if you can make up your mind to stay in prison a little longer you will help me to do this."

"Why," said Charles, "I have six days more to stay in this hole. I am under remand, you know, for a week."

"That is not enough," said Bennett. "Come, will you stay in prison a fortnight?"

Charles looked perplexed, then he said—

“You are a strange lawyer. You recommend me to stay in prison. Lawyers usually try to get their clients out.” Then he added with much impatience, “No, no, no. I ought to go.”

“To go where?” said the barrister, seating himself.

“To Florence, to Florence,” cried Charles, rising, and pacing the narrow limits of his cell with feverish excitement. “Each moment I waste here removes me further from Euphrosyne.”

“So,” said the lawyer, “you are in love with a young lady at Florence?”

“Yes,” cried Charles. “You were my father’s friend. I think I will tell you all. I think I can trust you?”

“Yes,” said Bennett, “tell me all your troubles, my boy ; whatever I can do I will do for you. I would do anything for your father’s son.”

“Well,” said Charles, “listen. I’ll tell you my whole story.”

“When John Elphinstone turned bankrupt and I was”—

“Who?” cried Bennett.

“John Elphinstone, my guardian.”

“John Elphinstone? Oh, John Elphinstone, of course. Tell me, where did he live?”

“At Devizes,” said Charles.

“At Devizes, of course, I remember now. What a miserable thing that fever of mine was. So he failed, did he?”

“Yes, and in his failure I lost all I had, about

£6,000, which had been paid on my behalf by a lawyer who brought me to him when I was a little boy, and placed me with him as Charles Benson."

"Yes, yes," said Bennett.

"So I had to leave Oxford; you remember how. After that I found some friends, and got a little money together and went abroad, and studied some time at Leipzig. I could not bear the place, and went away—went to Naples. Oh, I forget. At Leipzig I chanced to see the most beautiful girl that I have ever known, and I fell in love with her at once. By a strange chance I met her again in Naples, and got to know her and to love her more and more. And she loves me too. But I was poor, you know, and had to work for my living and gain it as best I could, and that did not look well. Then John Elphinstone managed to pay me back some of my money, and I thought I was once more going to become respectable and full of hope. I presented myself at the house of the girl I loved, at the house where formerly I was welcome. But lying tongues had done their work, and her mother, a proud French lady of rank and title, had learned what my birth was, and how poor I was, and forbade me the house, and told me that Euphrosyne could never be mine, not that she disliked me personally, but because—I was a bastard."

"Because you were a bastard, eh?" said Bennett.

"Yes, as if that was my fault. How cruel it

seemed, and how bitterly I felt it, I need not tell you, but I saw she was right. She comes of the proudest family of France, and could not give her daughter to such as me. But it seemed very hard, did it not? And very much harder when, afterwards, my dear girl told me how much she loved me, and that, be what I might, she could never love anyone but me. Oh, then I cursed my father, and I cursed my mother, through whose sins I suffered, for, at the moment, the gift of life they had given me seemed but a torture. And the thought that I was to lose this dear girl for no fault of mine, for no lack on my part, that even penniless I should have been, but for the ineffaceable stain on my name, accepted by Euphrosyne and accepted by her mother; this thought, I say, drove me wild, and I said things and did things that now I regret. Well, to avoid me, the leper, the pariah, the bastard, the haughty lady took her daughter away to Florence, and after hearing nothing from her for a long time I heard yesterday that my dear girl, my loved darling, is forced into a marriage with a man whom she does not and cannot love. That is my suffering, and when I think of all I have lost, of all that might have been mine but for the sin of my father and the sin of my mother, the curse I uttered once comes again to my lips."

"No, no," said Bennett, "you must not curse your father. He loved you well, and did all in his power for you. Nor curse your mother, but, if you will, curse *me*."

"Curse *you* !" cried Charles in astonishment.

"Yes; I have, through my weakness, offended much. It may come well in the end, it may come well in the end. Does the lady say when the marriage is to take place?"

"No," said Charles; "she says it shall not take place at all, but her mother seems most eager for the sacrifice, and will probably hasten its consummation. I meant to do a bold thing before this arrest took place. I meant to go to Florence and go to Euphrosyne and say, 'Euphrosyne, choose; either follow me or dismiss me altogether,' but then this happened, and I suppose I must resign myself to my fate."

"Do not grumble against your fate," said Bennett. "Things may come right in the end, and all may be well."

"You speak in riddles," said Charles impatiently; "I cannot understand you. You know my shame, and therefore also know that this shame is an ineffaceable one, and that she, therefore, Euphrosyne, can never be mine."

"I know several things," said Bennett, "and until I know a few more I cannot speak in a clear manner. Meanwhile I want you to make up your mind to stay here another week. I will send a solicitor down to defend you and to get a fresh remand. You must agree to that, it is in your interest. Nothing shall happen at Florence during that time. I have a friend there whom I will write to, and who will keep me *au courant* with what is going on. If this unhappy marriage

is being pushed on we must take other measures to prevent it. So you may set yourself at ease on that head, and I shall be very pleased to hear that you agree to what I propose."

"I will!" said Charles, taking the barrister's hand. "I will; I like you. I am pleased with you. You are the only man I have yet met that talks of Lord Hauberk as my father, and that pleases me. Yes; I will put my trust in you."

"Thank you," said the lawyer rising, "it will not be misplaced. Keep up your heart, my boy, and good-bye."

CHAPTER IV.

A NEWSPAPER PARAGRAPH.

How Charles fared when he was again brought up before the Clapham Common Magistrates may be learnt by reference to the following paragraph, cut from the police news column of a newspaper of the time:—

A RHYME TO SILVER.—The prisoner, Bill Kedges, who, it will be remembered, stands accused with having stolen from the person of Luke Bennett, Esq., a gold chronometer, valued at £100, was brought up on remand this morning. The prosecutor attended and repeated his statement, and witnesses were called to substantiate his evidence. Mr. Barlow, late pawnbroker and general dealer at Southampton, appeared for the prosecution, and swore that he had bought a watch, similar in all respects to the description of the stolen watch, from the prisoner. Other evidence was taken, and the magistrates were about to commit the prisoner, who observed a most obstinate silence, to take his trial at the next assizes, when the legal gentleman who appeared in his behalf applied for a further remand, stating that he thought he should be able to produce evidence to prove that this was a case of mistaken identity. A further remand was accordingly granted. The prisoner on being asked if he had any questions to put to any of the witnesses, answered with great *sang froid* that he would like to know if any of them could give him a suitable rhyme to "silver." (A laugh.) The witty Chairman answered, saying that "pilfer" would be a suitable one in his case. (Roars of laughter.) The prisoner was then removed, and the Court adjourned for luncheon.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DUKE PUT OUT OF THE WAY.

POOR little Euphrosyne, for ten long days she had waited for an answer to her piteous plaint, to the letter in which she had told her dear Charles that she was engaged to the Duke. For ten long days, and no message came, no letter, and she began to lose heart.

On the evening of the tenth day, the same day on which Charles had been a second time remanded, she was sitting, very disconsolate and down-hearted, in her room, reading over the few but very precious letters which she had received from her English lover, when Bianca came into the room and going up to her, said in a voice full of pity—

“Bad news, dear, bad news.”

“What?” cried Euphrosyne, turning pale, “is there bad news from England?”

“No.”

“Then what bad news can there be for me if he be well?”

“I heard my brother just now, speaking to his friend, the Principe di Rocca Nera. He said he was to be married to you in a week.”

“Your poor brother.”

“Ah, for I suppose you will never”—

“Never, Bianca, mia. Why, think of my Charles? Are we not *promessi sposi*?”

"Yes, yes, has he written?"

The tears came to Euphrosyne's eyes as she shook her head. "No, Bianca, no, not one little word. He may be *en route* for Florence, but he does not well to leave me thus, sorrowful and alone."

"Euphrosyne," said Madame de Bienaimée, entering the room.

"Yes, mamma."

"You must come, child, Signorina Ucello has come, and wants to try on your dress."

"What dress, mamma?"

"Your wedding dress, child."

"Is that so pressing?"

"Yes, child, of course. Oh! but I forgot that you don't know. Arnolfo was here this morning, and begged me to give my consent to having the marriage in seven days at the latest. He says he cannot wait longer for his happiness."

"Or rather," muttered Euphrosyne to herself, "his tailor can't wait for his bill."

"And so, child," continued the Baroness, "I gave my consent, and sent Giovanni round to Signorina Ucello's and begged her to come at once, and she is there waiting; so come along, little woman."

Euphrosyne rose, and said gravely—

"Mamma, I don't want to go to Signorina Ucello's. I don't want any wedding dress."

"Why not, my child?"

"Because, mamma, I am not going to be married yet."

"No, not for seven days."

"Not for seventy days, if *he* bides away."

"Euphrosyne!"

"Mother!"

"What do you mean?"

"There can be no wedding where the bridegroom is wanting, and mine is wanting."

"Arnolfo is in Florence."

"Arnolfo? Bridegroom? Why do you speak of him?"

"What nonsense, Euphrosyne; you know that it is all settled."

"Who settled it?"

"I did. You are engaged, affianced."

"Aye, but not to Arnolfo."

"You were publicly engaged to the Duke more than forty days ago."

"Forty days ago I was given away to the Duke in the face of man; thrice forty days ago I gave myself away to Charles Hauberk in the face of God."

"Euphrosyne," said the Baroness, almost angrily, "you must not, must not behave like this. You must talk no more nonsense about Charles Hauberk. That is all past and forgotten. I dare say that young Englishman has forgotten you. In seven days you marry the Duke."

"Mamma," said Euphrosyne, "come here. Look," and so saying, she threw open a cupboard in the wall, and pointed. "Look. That heap of white rags is the dress in which I appeared that night, at what was called my *fiancailles*, you see it

now. That dress," she said, pointing to another, "is the dress in which I plighted my troth to Charles. You see it is carefully cherished. Had you not spoken of dresses, mamma, I would not have shown you them. That is all I have to say."

"Those are all *chiaccherie*," said the Baroness; "really, Euphrosyne, you must be more sensible. Life is not all idyllic *à la* Watteau."

"It need not, however, be all *à la* Zola," said Euphrosyne.

"Anyhow, the fact remains that you marry Arnolfo in a week."

Euphrosyne ran up to Bianca, and throwing her arms round her neck, burst into tears, then she said—

"Bianca, how can I vex mamma with words? Do you, *cara mia*, speak for me," and with that she fled from the room.

"Dearest Bianca," said the Baroness, "what can Euphrosyne mean? I never saw such extraordinary conduct in her before. Can you tell why she has taken such a dislike to your brother?"

Bianca looked straight with her black fearless eyes at the Baroness. That was all the answer Bianca gave.

"Well, anyhow," said the Baroness, "it is too late to go into likes or dislikes now. I always thought Euphrosyne very fondly loved di Caserta. I am astonished at this behaviour now. She is positively rude to him! What can have come to her?"

"*Madrina mia*," said Bianca, "you forget Charles."

The Baroness stamped her foot angrily.

"Who is this boy," she cried, "that he should come between me and my daughter, and with his ill-omened appearance upset all my hopes in, and plans for, her happiness? Who is this boy? an adventurer having no fortune"—

"What fortune has my brother?" asked Bianca.

"Your brother is Duca di Caserta, and Charles Benson is a"—

"Poet," said Bianca, "and thus nobler in nobility than he."

"Poet?" cried the Baroness. "That does not palliate his birth. I assure you, Bianca, that I really liked the lad at first, but that now his name has grown absolutely hateful to me. Look what he has made of Euphrosyne. Look what she was before he met her, and look what she is now. Was ever mother blessed with a more obedient child than I? And now—well, you heard for yourself."

"If indeed she be affianced to Charles Hauberk," said Bianca, "she is only acting as any woman would do."

"How strange you are, Bianca. You appear to defend and excuse Euphrosyne. Do you forget that for this boy she is throwing over your own brother?"

"Were Arnolfo twenty times my brother, knew I him to be twenty times worthier of Euphrosyne,

I should still defend and excuse her for preferring Charles."

"How can you, why do you speak thus of your brother?" asked the Baroness with some astonishment.

Bianca's answer was very simple—

"Because I love Charles," she said.

"You love him?" cried the Baroness. "Bless me, what has come to the girls? Has this young man some potent love philtre, or what? It cannot be his *beaux yeux* only. Really, if I was not so vexed about all this trouble I should laugh. Perhaps I shall be the next to bow before this Jugger-naut of feminine happiness. But come, Bianca, you can't be serious; for if you loved Charles, as you say you do, surely you would not encourage Euphrosyne in her folly."

"Euphrosyne's *folly*," said Bianca, "is Euphrosyne's life. Euphrosyne's *folly* is Charles Hauberk's happiness. I love them both, and would see them happy."

"You must renounce your hopes, then," said the Baroness sternly. "I can put up with no more of this nonsense. It is absurd," she added petulantly, "and worse than absurd. Here is Euphrosyne, engaged to your brother, moaning after a boy of no family, without means, whom she only knew a few weeks, and who has probably forgotten all about her by now. I never wished to force my daughter to anything, but now that I see how earnest she is in her nonsense I shall be firm too. I won't have the name of my husband dis-

honoured. I won't have the Bienaimée arms quartered on an escutcheon which is defaced by the bar sinister. She shall be Bienaimée or di Caserta."

"Hauberk is a better name than ours," said Bianca. "We only go back to 1343. They go back to Hotspur!"

"Hauberk may, Benson does not."

"Charles denied any connection with Benson."

"But that is his name, I know it. Did not his college friend, Mr. Mangles, tell me so?"

"He said it was a name with which he had nothing to do."

"That shows his bad taste. Anyhow, I prefer my son-in-law's name to have no mystery about it, and I have said that I won't hear any more about him; I daresay he does not want to hear anything more about us. He is not a very attentive lover, anyhow."

"You forbade him the house."

"At Sorrento."

"Yes, but he is too much of a gentleman to come to Florence, seeing your dislike."

"He has certainly acted well in staying away. I never doubted his gentility."

"If ever 'noble' was written on the face of any man it was on the dear face of Charles."

"What nonsense you do talk, Bianca," said Madame de Bienaimée, smiling in spite of herself. "You cannot really be in love with this boy."

"If ever woman loved I do."

"And yet you oppose Euphrosyne's marriage with your brother."

"Are we all selfish, *madrina mia*? Can woman never make sacrifices? Is it the absolute rule of nature that women must have what they want, or rather, have you never heard of one's being happy in misery, when by that misery one is helping those one loves."

"Meanwhile, la Signorina Ucello is waiting. Where is Euphrosyne?"

Where is Euphrosyne?

In the garden talking to the Duke. Euphrosyne had met him in the hall when she had fled from her mother. At first she felt inclined to run away from him, then she stopped. She had an idea; she would act a part.

"Good-morning, Carina," the Duke had said.

"Good-morning, Arnolfo," had answered Euphrosyne.

"May Arnolfo kiss Euphrosyne?" said the Duke.

"Arnolfo, brother of Bianca, may."

"But may Arnolfo, affianced to Euphrosyne, kiss his bride?"

"Arnolfo, brother of Bianca, may," repeated the girl.

"Euphrosyne?"

"Arnolfo?"

"Do you only love me as the brother of Bianca?"

"I love you as the brother of Bianca."

"Then you love me?"

"Yes."

"May I kiss you?"

"I will compromise. Promise me something and then you may."

"What is it? Speak, that I may promise it."

"Not here, Arnolfo, come into the garden; I will tell you there."

"Well, now we are in the garden. What is it?"

"Arnolfo, is it true you wish to have the marriage in a week?"

"In an hour were it possible."

"But it is not possible. A week is much too early. I am not ready yet. Will you wait? Promise to wait for a month. You promised to promise, you know."

"Euphrosyne? A whole month? I shall be dead by then."

"Dead!"

"Yes, dead. Does that astonish you? You have heard of hearts breaking, have you not?"

"I have read of it. I have read many things that are beautiful. Was it not a man of this city, a Florentine, who told of his descent to Inferno? I read that. It was beautiful, but alas! it was not true."

"It is true, however, that by delaying this marriage, *sposa mia*, you consign me to an Inferno where no Beatrice will comfort me."

"And yet the Principessa di Benvenuta is dead."

"Poor Carmela, do you think she is there?"

"Where do suicides go, if not thither?"

"I do not know. Anyhow, I cannot promise."

"Why not? Why not?"

"Because I cannot live without you any longer. I love you."

"You did not love me at Sorrento?"

"Because I was blind."

"No, Arnolfo, be frank with me, even as I will be frank with you. You were rich then."

"Euphrosyne?"

"Yes, Arnolfo. Is it not known in Florence that your many debts, your squandered fortune, your poverty, make my dowry to you a matter of necessity?"

"Ha!" said the Duke. "That is known in Florence, is it? Well, is it not likewise known in Florence that my coronet is to rescue from the stain of a disgraceful marriage with a bastard adventurer, the last Bienaimée?"

"If you know this," said Euphrosyne, biting her lip, "why so press the coronet upon me?"

"You have just mentioned the reason, or what you and *tutto Firenze* take to be the reason."

"Arnolfo," said Euphrosyne, playing her part, "it is not seemly that we should thus bandy words. I only ask you to defer the marriage."

"In order that you may hear from your English lover, from the bastard."

"Does it fit the coronet to use that word before a girl? I know it, for I have read of that misery; but why do not you say from the man who saved your honour?"

"He lent me 2,000 francs. I repaid him, *voilà tout*."

"You repaid him, and no *voilà tout*. Did he not save your honour? Did he not rescue you from disgrace? I would say, 'Fie, on your ingratitude!' were you not my affianced. As it is, I only ask once more, will you"—

"No."

At this moment, the two, who had strayed out of the garden, were standing in the high road.

"You will not. It is cruel, Arnolfo. Why press me? I want a little time."

"You know the reason; you have taunted me with the reason."

"Well, then," said Euphrosyne, "good-morrow, *sposa mia*, I hear my mother calling, *a riveder*."

With these words, obedient to the call of her mother, she ran away, through the garden into the house, leaving Arnolfo standing in the road.

"Signorina, signorina," said he, looking after her, "you do not well, you do not wisely. In a week you become my wife, and in eight days you will have"—

"I arrest your Excellency," said a voice behind him; a hand was laid on his shoulder, and a stamped paper pressed in his hand.

The Duke started and turned. He found himself standing by the side of an officer from the *sceriffe* of Florence.

"On what authority?" asked he.

"On the authority of the *sceriffe*," answered the man.

"Ah! at whose suit?"

"At the suit of il Signor Cittadini, master tailor of this town. The recent seizure of your Excellency's effects did not produce one-tenth of a sufficiency to pay the claim of the Signor Cittadini, and this gentleman has this morning had a warrant issued for the arrest of the esteemed person of your ducal Excellency," answered the man.

And thus it happened that that night two notes were left at the house of the Baroness Bienaimée, one to Euphrosyne, which ran—

"CARA MIA,

"I agree to delay, though it breaks my heart.

"ARNOLFO DI CASERTA."

One to the Baroness—

"MADRE MIA,

"Business calls me to Rome; shall be away some time. The marriage day can be postponed if necessary. I do not know when I shall be back.

"Filio tuo devotissimo,

"A. DI C."

That night Euphrosyne came into Bianca's bed-chamber. The two girls talked long into the night. A plan was agreed upon. Next day Bianca sold three thousand francs worth of jewels.

CHAPTER VII.

INTERVIEW WITH LORD HAUBERK.

DURING the week that elapsed between Charles' first and second remand, Hiram and his associate had not been idle, and on the day when the young man was sent back to prison on a new remand, Hiram considered all his preparations complete and his plan only to await execution. He had given Snorker rendezvous at one o'clock at a bar in the Strand, and punctually at one o'clock the two confederates met.

"Well," said Snorker, "things are going well, the boy is to be kept dark for another week."

"Yes," said Hiram, "it is going on swimmingly. I go down to Appledean to-day."

"Indeed?"

"By appointment."

"Ho, ho."

"Yes, look here," and, so saying, Hiram handed Chizzlem a note, which bore the crest and coronet of the barony of Hauberk, and was dated from Appledean.

"Read it?" asked Snorker.

"Yes, if you can," said Hiram.

Snorker read.

"Appledean Manor,

"Melton Mowbray.

"SIR,—In answer to your letter of the 14th inst., I write to say that it is not my custom to

give my solicitor the first consideration of 'matters of vital importance and of the greatest possible interest' to myself, and that I prefer to have these laid before me personally.

"You can call at the Manor any day between four and seven in the afternoon, and I shall be glad to come to an understanding with you.

"I remain, sir,

"Yours, &c.,

"HAUBERK.

"B. Hiram, Esq."

"That's fortunate," said Snorker. "I never thought he would have a personal interview with you. When do you go down?"

"There is a train at two from St. Pancras," answered Hiram, "which gets to Kettering at 3.45, and from Kettering I can get the train on to Appledean, and be there by five o'clock. I am going to-day."

"And good luck go with you. Of course you don't want me?"

"No, I see no use in our going down together. Two look bad, besides it would only cost you money, and our terms are fixed."

"You're right. Be careful, there's a lot depends on it."

"No need for you to tell me that. There—Hansom!"

"Good-bye, where do we meet—when?"

"To-morrow morning, same place, twelve o'clock."

"Good-bye, Mil."

"Good-bye, Chiz."

"Heigh driver, stop. Oh, Mil, I forgot. Do you know whom I saw in London to-day?" said Snorker, lowering his voice.

"No, who?"

"The manager of the Marseilles branch of the Credit Bordelais. You remember Belmont's affair?"

"Damn him, he can't hurt us. Driver, St. Pancras. Good-bye," and with these words the Rev. Bartlemy Hiram drove off.

Lord Hauberk was sitting in his library that evening at six o'clock, reading as a stimulant before dinner, some choice *maxims* of Vauvenargues, when his valet, entering, informed him that a certain Mr. B. Hiram wanted to see him.

"B. Hiram, James," said Lord Hauberk. "I know nobody of that name."

"He said, my lord, that he came by appointment with your lordship."

"Hiram? B. Hiram. I think it must be a mistake," said Lord Hauberk, dipping into Vauvenargues.

"M'lud," said James, after standing in respectful silence for fully a quarter of an hour.

"Well, James."

"What answer shall I give to Mr. Hiram?"

"Tell him that la severite'n'est qu' un fard, no, no, of course not. Ask him what he wants."

"Yes, m'lud."

Presently James returned, bringing in Lord Hauberk's letter to Hiram.

"He says when your lordship has seen this letter, you will know what he wants," said James, handing the letter.

"Ah," said Lord Hauberk, taking the letter. "Curious writing. Why, I do declare I think it is my writing. James, is that my writing?"

"I think m'lud wrote that there."

"Oh, then I asked him to come. He had better come in. *Qui vit sans folie*. No, that's Rochefoucauld. Yes, James, show him in."

James went out, and in a few minutes Bartlemy Hiram stood in the august presence of Ralph, ninth Baron Hauberk.

"Mr. B. Hiram, m'lud," said James, bowing as he retired.

Lord Hauberk rose; and bidding Hiram take a seat, sat down and said—

"I am sorry, Mr. Hiram, to have kept you waiting, but Vauvenargues is too delightful. I distinctly prefer him to de la Rochefoucauld, and yet the dear Duke said some exquisite things."

"Who's Vovvy Nark and Delltrosh Foo, ko?" said Hiram to himself, then aloud. "Ah, true, my lord, Vovvy Nark beats Della roshfoo ko hollow."

"We won't say that, Mr. Hi-Hi-Hiram," said Lord Hauberk, "no; de la Rochefoucauld has some charmingly subtle thoughts. Of course you know his gem about conversation. *Une des choses qui fait que l'on trouve que &c.*"

Whilst Lord Hauberk was reading aloud with evident gusto, the cynic's exposure of conversation, Hiram took stock of him. He had expected a very different man, and his hopes rose finding no haughty, supercilious, business-like man of the world, but a little withered up *savant*, who seemed impregnated with the dust that lay on the modern part of his extensive library, and who wore instead of the coronet Hiram had evidently expected to see on the back of his head, a red cotton cap.

"Well," said Hiram, to himself, "I shall have no difficulty in bullying something solid out of this man, with his Vovvy Foo Ko, and Rosh Nark—Beautiful, my lord, delightful" (aloud), "indeed a bijou."

Lord Hauberk closed his book with a sigh, pushed it away, scanned Hiram carefully through his spectacles, then took a letter from his table and read it.

"Well, sir, to business," he said, when he glanced through the letter. "You wrote to me on the 14th, asking to be granted an interview with my solicitors on matters of vital importance and of the greatest possible interest to myself. Can you possibly have found a second Vauvargues?"

Hiram had prepared a long speech to introduce his statement, but his short acquaintance with Lord Hauberk had made him think that much precaution was unnecessary, and that it was a case for bullying and not for palaver, so he rose and blurted out—

"Only this, my lord, that it depends entirely on yourself whether you be any longer a my lord."

"Quite true, sir," said Lord Hauberk, without any evident surprise. "A very subtle remark. As my friend of Lonsdale has it on his coat of arms—*Magistratus indicat virum*—and"—

Hiram opened a large portfolio he had brought with him, and taking therefrom a formidable-looking folio document, placed it on Lord Hauberk's table, saying—

"If you will give that your attention, my lord, you will see what I mean."

Then he sat down, and began to make mental calculations as to how much he should ask for his information.

Lord Hauberk took the document, fitted his spectacles tightly on his nose, and began to read it.

The perusal of the document occupied him fully an hour, and he only once interrupted himself to bid James bring the candles. He let no exclamation of surprise or anger pass his lips all the time, but read it with a certain degree of interest, though signs of weariness did, now and then, escape him.

Whilst he was thus occupied, Hiram remained sitting still, and for all the calmness he essayed to maintain on his countenance, he did not feel quite at his ease, and shifted from time to time uneasily on his seat, listening wearily to the ticking of the clock, and watching his lordship with intense interest from time to time. One hour

passed, and as yet Lord Hauberk had said nothing. It was half-past seven. Hiram glanced at him. He was leaning back in his chair, holding the document in such a manner that it hid his face. A few more minutes passed, and suddenly the paper fell from his lordship's hand. To Hiram's surprise and disgust, he saw that Ralph, ninth Baron Hauberk, was asleep, and had apparently been so for some time. This was indeed annoying; he had expected the famous document to produce a very different effect.

Whilst he was speculating what to do to wake Lord Hauberk, this was done for him by the entrance of James, who had come to announce dinner.

Lord Hauberk started up, rubbed his eyes and said, "James, what is the time?"

"Eight o'clock, m'lud."

"What, James, is dinner half-an-hour late?"

"No, but we thought your lordship was engaged."

"Faugh. I have been asleep."

James gave Hiram a thoroughly contemptuous look as he withdrew.

"Mr. Hiram," said Lord Hauberk, "you must excuse me for going to sleep, and you will excuse me for not being able to invite you to dinner. I always dine alone. The Brookshire Arms in the village is, they say, véry comfortable. Good evening sir."

"But, my lord," said Hiram, almost irritably, "what do you say about the paper?"

"What paper?"

"The paper I laid before you."

"Oh!" said Lord Hauberk, "that, you may take it away with you. It does not interest me in the slightest. If it is true, I leave Appledean, if not, I stay. That is all. You should not have given me hopes. You spoke of having matters of the greatest possible interest to me to tell me. I declare I thought you had found a third cynic."

"D—n you for an old fool." growled Hiram to himself, as he withdrew crestfallen from the room, taking with him the wonderful document which was to have done so much and brought so much money into his pockets.

"And is it to end like this?" he growled to himself, as he walked down to the park gates. "What a spiritless old idiot that Hauberk is. Went to sleep did he? And Bennett and his gang will triumph, will they? And I and Snorker can go to the d—l can we? There is not a trump left in my hand. My information and my silence are worth nothing to anybody but to that drivelling old Vovvy Nark bloke, and he cares so little for it that he goes to sleep; and I, who had counted on about £20,000 down, and a large fraction of my lord's income and his patronage, have to go back to that withered old hag, Sabine, and her wretched £1,000 a year, or rather to the three-pence a week pocket money she offers, curse her. Can Snorker have forestalled me? No, I don't think so, he fears me too much. Can that fellow Bennett have been making terms with my lord?"

No, I don't think so ; my lord did not seem to know anything about it, and did not seem to care. Well, that game's up, and I must give it up and go and get Sabine out of the asylum. Her £1,000 a year are all I have now between me and starvation. Starvation ! " he hissed between his teeth, as he left the park and stood in the road, looking back on the stately old manor that appeared half-hidden behind magnificent trees, and marking the luxury and evident wealth that all its *entourage* bespoke. " Starvation ? Why should I starve while yonder old fool has thousands of acres all his own, and the jingle of thousands of sovereigns whenever he cares for such music ? Am I not as good as he, and better ? And why have I to turn to twist, like a cursed fox to live ? "

It was too late to think of going back to London that night, and so he was forced to take Lord Hauberk's advice, and put up at the Brookshire Arms Hotel.

Next morning he woke in a very bad humour. His want of success weighed very heavily on him. In the coffee-room a note was brought to him by the waiter, who said it had been brought from the Manor by one of his lordship's servants. Hiram seized it eagerly, and his heart beat high as he thought that the old lord had only pretended indifference in order to make better terms, and that this note was to summon him back to the Manor for the purpose of a conversation with him.

He tore the note open hastily ; the next minute

he dashed it with an oath to the floor, and calling for his bill, paid it and left the house.

The waiter who had brought him the note had witnessed all this, and as soon as Hiram had left the house he picked the letter up and read it.

It was this :—

“Appledean Manor.

“DEAR MR. HIRAM,

“I retract all I said about de la Rochefoucauld as inferior to Vauvenargues. I have found three maxims of the Duke’s which beat Vauvenargues’ best things. I hope you are comfortable at the Brookshire Arms.

“HAUBERK.

“B. Hiram, Esq.”

This was Hebrew to the waiter, but he laid it reverently aside. It came from the Manor, and bore the sign-manual of Ralph, ninth Baron Hauberk. That letter would be handed down to his descendants as an heirloom.

As soon as Hiram got to London, he drove straight to Peckham Lodge, and asked and gained admittance to Dr. Phillipot.

“Well, Mr. Hiram,” said the doctor, rising to greet his visitor, “what brings you here? Any more grist for our mill?”

“Aye, but not with me. I would not mind locking up an old driveller I know of in the country here; it would not do him much harm,” answered Hiram, with a scowl. “No, doctor, I come to take my wife away.”

"Indeed! and may I ask why?"

"I am going to leave England, and that is why."

"And want to give your dear wife the benefit of a change of air, eh?"

"That's my business. How is she?"

"Balmy. She does not know who put her here. She swears by you. Gad, to hear her talk of you, one might fancy she believed you a saint. One can't say anything to her but she fires up and threatens one with her husband."

Hiram smiled, he liked the compliment; then he said—

"You are sure she don't know who put her here?"

"No, sir; at least she did not until quite lately, till a brute, Esther White, a pauper patient, told her. It appears Esther White knew you."

"Zounds," cried Hiram, "what's that you say about Esther White?"

"It appears," answered the mad-doctor, "that this girl, who was sent here from Dartford, had an interview with your wife, and spoke of you as knowing you, and gave her the tip as how she came there, and then bolted."

"What! has Esther escaped?"

"Aye, some time back."

"Then curses on her," muttered Hiram, "that woman is always in my way. A thousand to one but it is she who has spoilt my game. Only let me catch her—that's all."

Then turning to Dr. Phillipot, he said, "What

do I owe you? I want to take my wife out at once."

"Ten pounds for the last quarter, seven guineas medical attendance, eight pound ten and nine for extras, including use of piano, and ten pounds for the ensuing quarter in lieu of a quarter's notice."

"Anything, anything, I want her out. What's the total?"

"Thirty-five pounds seventeen and nine. No, sir, no cheques—I prefer cash."

"Well, here, and here. Fetch Sabine, and see her things got ready."

The meeting between Sabine and her spouse need not be described at length. Sabine's first question was how much of her income had been accumulated. Hiram, who had had no time during his wife's short confinement to obtain the Lord Chancellor's vesting order over her property, was able to give her a satisfactory answer. Hiram, then, with consummate hypocrisy, related his distress at her sudden disappearance, his anxious quest after his dearly beloved wife, and his great joy at finding her; and fully agreed with her that there was a very reasonable, sufficient, and well-founded ground for entertaining the suspicion that Dorothy Crosthwaite had originated, begun, and carried out the abominable plan of confining a sister, of whose matrimonial felicity she was doubtless jealous, in a lunatic asylum; and there and then on the common ground of injured innocence, with the common purpose of exposing and punishing so unnatural a monster, the spouses made the peace, and for-

getting past grudges, mutual grievances, and all ill-will, turned over a new leaf in their wedded life, and took a cab to Bayswater.

On their way thither, where Hiram had an appointment to keep, he told his wife that he thought after her long and cruel confinement a visit to Paris would be a nice change; but Sabine, who had still fresh in her mind the memory of Bartlemy's Parisian eccentricities, strongly opposed the idea of a second visit to the gay metropolis, and suggested Clapham as an eligible scene for the pastoral they had agreed to enact.

By the aid of some well-timed refreshment, which took the varied form of kisses and pork pies, embraces and fluid peppermint, Bartlemy induced his wife to agree to a visit to Granville, and a day was fixed for their departure to that pleasant seaside resort.

"Them balmy breezes and warbling woodlands will be an 'eavenly orchestra to our new love; and, arm-in-arm, hand-in-hand, heart linked to heart, we will—a-a-h!! Driver, drive on; Sabine, draw down that curtain. It's nothing, dear. I saw a blo—, I mean a man what strongly resembles a co—, a man who in early youth wounded my tenderest feelings."

Bartlemy said this. The manager of the Credit Bordelais at Marseilles had passed the cab in the middle of his speech, and apparently had recognized one of its occupants.

CHAPTER VIII.

DE JURE AND DE FACTO.

SNORKER was true to his tryst ; and punctually at mid-day on the morrow of the day when Hiram, his trusty companion, had taken his departure for Appledean, arrived at the bar in the Strand where they had agreed to meet. Hiram was naturally not there, and not there Hiram remained for upwards of two hours, and very disgusted did Mr. Chizzlem become. He waited till three o'clock, however, and then, as there were no signs of Hiram, he departed very angry and full of suspicion.

"He's played me false," he muttered to himself, as he walked down the Strand. "He's played me false. He's gone and made terms with the old lord and now thinks I and the money he owes me may both go to the devil.

"I have done all the dirty work, run all the risks, committed perjury over and over again to help him, and he's gone and got the jam. I do not like them ways. Always act square to a pal is my motto, and what I acts upter and as I acts I would be acted by. Oh, isn't he just laughing at me, now he's got the money and is off out of danger? Isn't he a chuckling to hisself as he thinks how he has sold C. Snorker, Esquire, and thinks that C. Snorker, Esquire can't round on him noways ;

but if he thinks that, strikes me he is mistaken, for although it would not do for me, nor pay me, to go and blow on the polly jobs with Sabine and Esther, nor on the case he's put up against that there Benson, for I know as well as he knows, blind him, that I should be in Queer Street by so doing. I yet think I can get Mr. Milwaukee Bartholomew on the hip. Ah! he's a scoundrel, if ever there were sich a thing. Gad, now I think of it, what's the meaning of that bloke from the Credit Bore-delay being over in London? I wonder if he's on our track? Don't think so. Don't think the manager would come acting the policeman. Yet the Belmont business was a large one. How many thousand francs were it? Bless me if I remember. There again I was cat's paw. I ran all the risk and got a beggarly £100 for my trouble. Bartholomew, who sat at home, took the balance, and a mighty heavy balance it was and all; and now he's got another balance and all. Well, we'll see if we cannot upset his balance and all this time."

Occupied with these thoughts Chizzlem Snorker returned home. All that week he went about London like a ferret, trying to find out what had become of the Rev. Bartlemy spying and scouting about the places where that gentleman was likeliest to be found. But it was all unavailing. Bartlemy had vanished from the face of the town, and Snorker returned home more furious than ever against him. One day the horrid thought struck him that perhaps the appearance

of the manager of the Credit Bordelais had something to do with Bartlemy's disappearance ; perhaps Milwaukee was arrested, but then, he reasoned, that was impossible ; an Englishman cannot be arrested in England for a crime he had committed in France, and then again he would have certainly heard something about it, or read something in the papers, which was not the case. No ; either Milwaukee, terrified by the presence of the manager in London, was in hiding, or, what was infinitely more probable, had made good terms with his lordship and had decamped, leaving his friend to bear the consequences of having caused two sane women to be confined in a lunatic asylum, by means of wilful and corrupt perjury, and of having falsely sworn against Charles Benson that he had committed a crime which Snorker himself had perpetrated. Of course now Snorker had not the remotest idea of again appearing at the Clapham Police-court, or of going on with the charge against William Kedges ; no, what he meant to do was simple enough ; get all his funds together and start some fresh villany on and for his own account, and for the future to eschew partners of either sex, or of any kind, to be cat's paw no longer, and above all, to nurse his grievance against Bartlemy, until such time when he could inflict condign punishment on that treacherous defaulter.

And therefore it happened that when Charles Hauberk was again brought up before the Clap-

ham magistrates, neither of the principal witnesses for the prosecution were present. Luke Bennett appeared again and explained that he had been mistaken, and evidence was brought by Charles' legal adviser to prove that he was not Bill Kedges.

"But somebody must have stolen the watch," was the sage remark of the witty Chairman.

"Yes, your worship," answered Charles' solicitor, "somebody stole it, and some somebodies have committed perjury, as I now intend to prove. It appears, your worship that this young man is the victim of a conspiracy in which the prosecutor, whom I exonerate from all blame, is an unsuspecting accomplice. Mr. Snorker, I shall be able to prove, is the real thief of the watch, and the Mr. Barlow who described himself as a general dealer at Southampton is his accomplice, of the name of Hiram. I now call Mr. Sigg, pawnbroker and dealer in precious stones, of Southampton."

Mr. Sigg was no other than the shopkeeper from whom Charles had bought some handkerchiefs, before starting for Naples on the *Voorwaarts*, and at whose shop he had noticed the watch which had been stolen from Mr. Luke Bennett.

The evidence given by Mr. Sigg, and afterwards by Master Jeremiah Sigg, fully exculpated Charles, who was acquitted at once and discharged. On the application of Charles' solicitor, warrants were

then and there issued by the Chairman for the arrest of Snorker and Barlow, *alias* Hiram, for theft, perjury, and conspiracy.

"*Enfin*," said Charles, as he stepped out into the street. Then as he saw Mr. John Bennett coming out of the court-room, he went up to him and said, "Well, and what have these three weeks of confinement profited me? What news have you from Florence?"

"No news, my dear boy, but excellent news in London. Come, let us get away from this odious place at once."

"Have you had my things at Manor Street seen to; is my dear little dog safe, and my books?"

"Everything is safe," answered Bennett, "all is as you left it. You had better come to Manor Street and get your things and take Fang, who has been well looked after, and then come to London with me. I have taken rooms for you at the Grosvenor."

While they were walking to Manor Street, Luke Bennett came puffing up behind. They turned, and Luke Bennett, doffing his hat, began to make many apologies to Charles for having caused him this annoyance, interpolating threats against the treacherous Snorker.

"It's all right, it's all right," said John Bennett, "don't stop us, Luke, we're very hurried."

Soon all things being arranged at Manor Street, Charles and John Bennett found themselves in a first-class carriage of the District Railway, being whirled to Victoria.

On their way there Charles kept repeating his question about Florence. Bennett had had no news, his correspondent had failed him. Charles was very put out, and spoke of going to Florence that same day.

"You will do nothing of the kind," said Bennett; "wait till this evening, perhaps then you will have some good news to telegraph to her."

Anyhow, Charles, as soon as he got to Victoria, went straightway to a telegraph-office and sent off the following telegram to Euphrosyne:—

"GROSVENOR HOTEL,

"Hope for best and be loyal.

"CHARLES."

This was all Bennett gave him time to write, for the little barrister was fevered with a strange excitement, and could hardly check himself from dragging Charles off with main force to the hotel.

"What is the matter with you, sir?" said Charles, for, as they approached the hotel, Bennett's excitement seemed to increase.

"Oh, nothing, nothing," answered the barrister, as he hurried along. "You'll see."

As soon as they reached the hotel, Bennett begged Charles to wait an instant at the foot of the steps, saying he would come for him in a few moments, as he had a question to ask of the secretary.

Whilst Charles was waiting thus, a man ran

up to him apparently very much out of breath, and said—

“Excuse me, sir; did I see you just now with Mr. Bennett?”

“Yes.”

“Well, please give him this note when you see him again. It’s very important. I’m in a great hurry and cannot wait.”

“You had better give him the note yourself,” said Charles, “he has only just entered the hotel”—

“No, no,” said the man, pressing the letter into his hand and moving away. “No, I’ve not a moment to spare, but have to be at Charing Cross in five minutes. Thank you, sir. Hansom!” And away he drove.

Charles was looking after him, wondering what it might all mean, when he was touched on the shoulder. It was Mr. Bennett.

“Come, Charles,” he said, “come, all is ready.”

So saying, he led Charles into the hotel and up the grand staircase to an apartment on the first floor. They entered together an elegantly furnished drawing-room, and whilst Charles was wondering whatever this might portend, the excited little barrister fell on his neck and said—

“My dear Charles, your unhappy days are over. I have redeemed my promise to your father. Let me be the first to greet you as Charles, eighth Earl of Brookshire and ninth Baron Hauberk, and to wish your lordship long and happy years.”

“Whatever do you mean?” cried Charles, after

a pause, delighted by the intense astonishment and pleasurable excitement that caused it. "Whatever do you mean?" then he looked at the barrister as if he thought he had gone out of his mind.

"What I have said. That those who termed you a bastard lied, and that you are a legitimate son, and *de jure* and *de facto* what I have just had the honour of calling you. Sit down, my lord, and I will explain."

Charles gave way to his feelings in a long and merry laugh. Then he ran up to Mr. Bennett and shook his hand, saying—

"Is it really, really true? No bastard? No bastard?"

Then he paused, and turned very pale, and looked as though he were about to faint; then he fell back on a chair and covering his face with his hands, seemed to weep; but this reaction did not last long, and presently he was up again and talking in the greatest excitement, and, running about the room, he repeated to himself—

"No bastard! No bastard!"

Suddenly a thought struck him and he rushed to the door; then he paused, and a look of bitterness and disappointment came over his face.

"No," he said; "this is what I have longed for all my life, but I did not want it to come thus. I wanted to give the world the lie. I wanted to raise myself, not to be raised. I do not like the thought that it has all been done for me. I feel like a convict, convicted, though innocent, to whom

a free pardon is brought, where he had formed plans of escaping from his vile and unjust suffering by force, and by his own strength. And yet—Earl of Brookshire, and no longer Charles Benson with an alias. Oh, it is too much, it is too much.”

Then he made his way to the door, saying—

“I must telegraph this to Euphrosyne. Yes, that and that only makes it sweet to me. I shall no longer be contemptible to her mother, but come to her a wooer equal in birth and untarnished, with all the honours of a hundred glorious ancestors thick upon me, with all the fame, no longer usurped, of our illustrious house. Yet how pitiful that by these gauds I vanquish, and that only when decked in inherited splendours, only when brilliant with the homage of the world, I am acceptable to her. No longer to win her by the force of my arm, by the power of my head, by the passion of my heart, but by the honours of dead men, and the hollow applause of fools. But what matter the means if by them Euphrosyne be won? What matter how I win her so she be mine? Will her eye be less bright, her cheek less soft, her bosom less warm, because she is won for me by my name and not by my prowess? God’s truth, to have longed all my life for this and now to regret it. I had offered to do battle against the world, and had hurled in its odious face my gauntlet of contempt and was eager for the fray, desirous of the battle, conscious of my garnered strength, reckless of the issue, and now it offers

to parley, and my arm must relax, and my heart throb no more, and active, I must abandon activity, hot with anticipated strife, must renounce strife, braced for the encounter, must relax and forego the contest, and, with a thousand insults, a thousand taunts, a thousand, thousand tears to revenge, smile and accept, with the right hand already raised to smite the lying lips, accept the compromise the world offers. But the strife was for Euphrosyne, and though there is to be no fighting, Euphrosyne is to be mine, and—yet—Yes, I will telegraph to Florence.”

“Stay, my lord,” said the barrister, “do nothing too hastily.”

“Why?” answered Charles, pausing, with his hand on the handle of the door. “Did you not tell me that, *de jure* and *de facto*, I was my father’s heir?”

“Yes,” answered Mr. Bennett, “but of course you understand, that, although in my mind I am fully convinced of your claim being a rightful one, and that you can be proved to be what I have said, still the world will want convincing, and that will take a little time.”

“Of course,” said Charles; “and indeed I little care whether what you say be true or not. Liars!” cried he, stepping to the window and menacing, with his balled fist, the world without. “Liars! Liars! Do you hear that? I am no bastard, I am no bastard. You lied. You lied. I am nobler than you all. I am greater than you all. And yet I scorn my nobility, and I scorn my greatness,

because I hate you, and because to be compared to you is to me an insult."

Then he threw up the window, and shouted down the street—

"I am the Earl of Brookshire, and ye are fools and knaves. I have now the right to scorn and disdain ye, and insult, and ignore and condemn ye. Bah! Now, sir, tell me all about it," he said, closing the window, and turning to Mr. Bennett. "How do you know this; what proof have you?"

"I was solicitor to your father and tended him at his death," answered Mr. Bennett. "On his death-bed he proclaimed you his son and heir."

"But made no will?" said Charles.

"He died suddenly, a violent fever took him away after four days' sickness. I wanted him to commit what he said to paper, or to repeat it before witnesses, but he died within a few minutes of those, his last words. But come with me, Charles. You shall hear the whole story from other lips than mine. Come into the next room. Some people are waiting for you there."

With these words Mr. Bennett rose, and leading Charles by the arm, opened a door, and passed with him into an adjoining room.

CHAPTER IX.

"THAT IS YOUR MOTHER!"

"HERBERT!"

"Charles."

"However came you here?"

"I came from Italy a few days ago."

"Mr. Bennett, what does this all mean?"

"Wait a minute. Let me introduce you to Mrs. Dora Dixon, *de jure* Countess of Brookshire, your mother."

Charles reeled.

"*My mother?*"

A tall lady, dressed in deep mourning, advanced towards him from a corner of the room where she had been standing, threw back her veil, and after a rapid glance at him, ran up to him and caught him in her arms, for, so excited was he with astonishment, that he seemed nigh unto falling.

"Thank you, Mr. Bennett," she cried. "It is indeed my son. Herbert, this is your brother."

Charles was so utterly bewildered that he stood quite still, and spake never a word, but with open mouth, stared at Mr. Bennett as if for an explanation.

"Yes, that is your brother," said the barrister, "I give you my word for it."

"Dear Charles," cried Herbert, springing forward. "I am no less astonished than you are, I

can hardly believe it, and yet I can scarcely love you more as a brother than I do as a friend. How wonderful it is. Come, Charlie."

But Charles drew back. No, he did not like this. He had had his grievance, and had borne it alone, he did not want a partner in it now. Then he had always patronized Herbert as a very respectable young man, but had also always looked on him as an inferior and could hardly accept him as a brother. Then there was no proof but the barrister's word, and Charles, glancing at Mr. Bennett's excited face and manner, remembered what that gentleman had said about his malady, and it seemed probable that he was only suffering a relapse. But as he looked at Herbert's open, generous face, and saw the joy and love and pleasure depicted thereon, and noticed the smile of warm affection and the outstretched arms, he felt how mean his impulse had been, how much worthier and better a fellow Herbert was than he; and his better nature getting hold of him, he too gave a smile and put out his arms, and felt rewarded when in the warm embrace of his brother, he felt that he was no longer alone, but that at least one loving heart was bound to him by the strong ties of brotherhood.

"Charles, have you nothing for your mother?" said the lady.

Charles looked at her. He at last realized that there, in person, stood before him the woman he had always hated, the woman whom in bitter grief he had so often cursed, the woman whom he

had dreamt of as the evil spirit of this life. He looked at her earnestly and long, and scanned her well. She was no common peasant wench, no flaunting actress of some low theatre, no vulgar woman of the people, but tall, graceful, and, but for the deep melancholy of her face, exceedingly beautiful; abundance of chestnut hair, flecked here and there with streaks of grey, large, lustrous, luminous eyes, a beautiful mouth, beautiful in despite of the sorrows it bespoke, an expression of chastity, purity and world-weariness, a skin white as alabaster, a long, graceful neck, and the form and figure of an aristocrat; he marked them all.

Well, too, did he mark, and his heart bled as he did so, the utter melancholy, the deep-seated regret, the sorrow that her face expressed. What must she have suffered; must not her sufferings, her sorrow have been infinitely greater than his. And there she stood, with a timid questioning look, with a fitful tinge of colour coming to her white cheeks, or leaving them, leaving them whiter than before, with her arms, but just now stretched out to embrace him, her eldest, her long-lost son, dropping in despair as she saw that from him she could expect no forgiveness, no pity, no love, as she recognised that indeed he had learned to curse her name, and that he, like the rest of the cruel world, had cast her off, and disowned her.

"Charles, it was not my fault."

But still he moved not. No, she had left him, she had abandoned him, she was the unnatural mother, it was her sin and her folly that were the

cause that for all his life he had been an outcast, a pariah; that his name had been a byword amongst men; it was too late now. Her love was too worthless an offering now. All her affection, all her love, all her repentance, could not unsay one insult spoken against him, one reproach cast, one jeer, one jibe levelled at him. For so many years motherless, did he need a mother now? All his youth spent in yearnings, his heart had no yearning now; famishing in his boyhood for his mother's love, his heart had died, and knew the cruel famine for love not any more. He had asked for bread, and a stone had been offered to him. He needed bread no longer.

"That is my mother!" he said to himself, trying to waken beneath that devotional name some feeling of tenderness. "My mother!" Name cursed a hundred times—on sleepless couch, on solitary walk, 'mid the happy homes of others, where he had felt his solitude, his misery, all the more. "That is my mother — mother? — mother? — mother?"

Then he looked at her again, and noticed for the first time that everybody in the room was silent, and looking at him; while she stood there, casting now and then tender glances of love and remorse and supplication at him. How very beautiful she was! How proud he might have been of her; how he would, how he could, have loved her! How he would have struggled for her kiss, for her embrace; how he would have dreamed of her all night and followed

her all day; from how much sin and folly she would have saved him; how sunny his youth might have been, how dark and sunless it had been; but now that his heart was seared and blighted, now that he had drunk his cup of bitterness to the dregs—now, surely, it was not the time for her to come and claim his love as her due, his embrace as her tribute.

Charles' silence was terribly painful to all around, and most of all to his mother. She, bitterly wounded, moved sadly away and covered her streaming eyes with her little white hand.

Then Charles sprang forward. The magic name of "mother" had conquered. That fair angel weeping before him was his mother. Falling on his knees he seized her hand, and pressing his lips to it kissed it, saying—

"My mother, my own mother, forgive me!"

She raised him up tenderly, and throwing her arms round his neck embraced him, kissing his lips, and eyes, and neck and hair in a passion of pent-up longing and burning love.

"My own Charles, my first-born; my handsome, beautiful boy! Why did I ever leave you? Why did I leave you? Oh, Charlie, it is I that must beg for forgiveness, not you. I have nothing to forgive. You could not love me. You thought that I was the cause of your sorrow, your disgrace. It was very natural. You must have cursed me over and over again. But I am your mother, Charlie; nothing can undo that. Oh, I, too, have suffered; I, too, have longed for my first-

born ; I, too, have yearned for you. You will hear it was not all my fault. You will hear that before you judge too hastily of me."

Charles, disengaging himself from his mother's arms, dashed the tears from his eyes and turned to Mr. Bennett, saying—

"Now, sir, please explain all this mystery."

Mr. Bennett went up to Mrs. Dixon and said—

"Are you ready, madam, to tell your part of the story? I will speak next."

Mrs. Dixon, composing herself with a visible effort, took her first-born's hand in hers and began her story.

CHAPTER X.

MRS. DIXON'S STORY.

"I WAS born in Guernsey, first child and eldest daughter of the Rev. John Herbert Lovell, rector of the parish of St. Peter's Port, and of Millicent Lovell, his wife. When I was fourteen years old, my sister Esther was born, and at the same time my dear mother died, following my father to the grave—he had died four months previously. After the death of our parents we were taken care of by a Miss Le Page, my mother's sister, a middle aged lady, who lived in the island. We stayed with her a year and some months. She was very kind to us, and wished to keep us with her altogether, although we were necessarily a burden to her, for she was not rich, but yielded at last to the earnest wish of my father's brother, Stanley Lovell, a single gentleman who lived at Broseley, who very much wished to have his brother's orphans in his home.

"Accordingly we went to him—would that we had never entered the house! He was most unkind to me, being of a very violent temper and intensely irritable. I, too, in my youth was cursed with a violent temper, and our quarrels were frequent and bitter. One day he so far forgot himself as to cast a reproach on the memory of my dear mother. I retorted, and he was so rude that I resolved, in hot,

foolish, girlish haste, to leave his house. I had some money, and was not without some worldly wisdom, and felt quite ready to face the world. I can hardly now remember what I proposed doing; in hot haste I had formed my resolution and in hot haste I acted. It was in the evening, and Esther was in bed. I ran upstairs to my room, and waited till I heard my uncle leave the house—he was dining out somewhere that night; then I made a few hasty preparations, gathered my money and jewels together, tied a few things up in a handkerchief, went to Esther's room—the nurse was out—took her from her little bed, dressed her, and left my uncle's house with her for ever.

“I suppose all men and women who leave home to make their fortunes turn to London with bright hopes and expectations; I know I did. My hopes were very bright, for I felt unlimited confidence in myself, in my strength of will and firmness of purpose. I looked to the stage to realize these hopes; I had a good voice, and had acted successfully in some private theatricals and charades that had been given at my uncle's house and by Broseley friends.

“I had not the least doubt that any manager would at once engage me at a fabulous salary, and Bohemian life seemed to me the only life worth living.

“I need not say that none of these hopes were realized. I went to the managers of nearly every theatre in London, and was everywhere met with refusal, and even ridicule or insult. My stock of

money soon dwindled down, and, although I little minded hardship for myself, I could not bear to see my little Esther suffer. Soon I had to part with my jewels, and soon, too, my clothes began to go, for no sacrifice seemed to me too great to be made on her behalf. But as the purchase money of these paltry articles began very quickly to disappear, and starvation began to stare me in the face I felt my courage failing me, and more than once I thought of writing to my uncle and praying for his assistance. My pride, however, always revolted from such a step, and I felt that any suffering would be preferable to comfort procured by an appeal to the man who had insulted my mother:

"I had come to my last shilling one day, and was in a terrible state of mind as I looked at the paltry little coin, held in so little account by the inhabitants of the great, luxurious, extravagant city around me, which stood between me and starvation, and what was infinitely worse and more heart-rending, the starvation of my little sister. I cannot now recall all the thoughts that passed through my mind, all the vague, wild plans I formed, only to dismiss them from my thoughts in despair. I had tried every theatre, almost, in London, and had failed to get employment at each and all; but suddenly there flashed across my mind the name of a very fashionable West End theatre, which I had never tried. I had always been frightened and nervous, it seemed so grand and elegant, of entering it, and had never

been able to muster up sufficient courage to present myself to the manager. Hunger, however, and despair soon bring one's courage to the sticking-point, and I determined then, as a last resource, to see if the manager of the Théâtre des Chameaux—for so it was called—was in need of a *figurante* or of a *soubrette*. My grand ideas of bursting, comet-like, upon London, as a second Vestris or Siddons had, as you see, soon humbled themselves down.

“Well, dressing myself as prettily as I could out of the scanty stock of dresses left to me, and foolishly, girl-like, wasting one of my two six-pences in buying a rose to put in my hair, I set out for the Théâtre des Chameaux. I well remember lingering about in the street before I could muster up sufficient courage to ring at the entrance to the manager's office. I must have waited fully an hour, and I blush now as I think of the way in which I was addressed by the passers-by. One young fellow, I particularly remember, pestered me with his foolish talk, vainly endeavouring to get me into a conversation with him. He was a young man who was very well known in London at that time, and I knew his name. He afterwards was shot at Baden-Baden by an enraged husband, or went into the Church and became Bishop of L—, I forget which it was. Anyhow, it was to escape his attentions that I took heart and, running across the street, rang the manager's bell.

“After stating my business, I was requested by

the powdered and supercilious footman who opened the door for me to wait whilst he acquainted M. Lapin, the *directeur*, of my presence. I waited some time, and from where I was sitting could hear what was going on in the manager's private room, the door of which opened on to the entry where I was waiting. Although very nervous and excited I listened with some anxiety to hear what answer M. Lapin would give to the servant, and if he would grant me an interview. M. Lapin, from the sounds which issued from his room, appeared to be making merry with his friends, for I heard the sounds of many voices and much laughter. The conversation, as far as I could hear, treated chiefly about actresses, noblemen, and horses, and was liberally spiced with fashionable oaths and current Parisian slang. The footman who had given me admittance did not at once carry my message to his master; but, standing opposite to me at a disrespectful distance, occupied himself with his nails and in trying to enter into conversation with me. When he found this useless, and had in vain repeatedly solicited me to give him the flower I wore as a 'suvvener,' he at last condescended to inform M. Lapin of my call.

"With beating heart, and with half a mind to call him back, I watched him knock at the door and enter the room. I then heard the following conversation:

" 'What do you want, Alphonse?'

" 'A girl has called; she wishes to see you, sir.'

" 'A what?'

“‘A girl.’

“‘What—ah—what is she like?’

“Alphonse gave no answer; he made some pantomimic gesture, I presume, probably complimentary to me, for I heard a shout of laughter.

“Presently I heard the thin, affected voice, which I attributed to the French manager, again—

“‘So she is’—

“A pause; then there came another roar of laughter.

“I felt so indignant at being made a subject of mirth amongst men whom I really despised, and so enraged at the insolence of the footman, that I rose to go. Then I remembered poor little Esther and stayed.

“‘In fact, Alphonse, you think that *Ca ira, Ca ira, Ca ira*?’

“‘Probably, *M’sieu*.’

“‘What do you say, gentlemen, shall we have her in? What do you say, *Assommant*?’

“A rough, harsh, drunken voice answered—

“‘I don’t care. Is she beautiful, Alphonse?’

“I suppose the insolent fellow pretended to blush, for I heard more laughter and cries of—

“‘Don’t blush, Alphonse; we won’t take her from you.’

“‘Well,’ said the manager, ‘let her come in.’

“‘I say, *Lapin*,’ interrupted a voice which I had not heard before, but which seemed to belong to the only gentleman present, ‘I say, *Lapin*, hadn’t you better see her alone, and not bring her in here? It’s hardly a place for a girl. She

may be some poor, innocent creature looking for employment, who will sink to the ground with shame on entering a room filled with such company. Look, there is Assommant nearly drunk; then look at those pictures, those prints. Why, you wouldn't receive a strange ballet-girl in here, and why'—

“Several voices here interrupted the speaker. First came the rough, harsh, drunken voice I had heard before.

“‘Privilege, my lord, privilege; d—n it all, privilege. Lapin wants her in here, company wants—look at her. I want to look at her; we all want to look at her. Lapin shan't see her alone. D—n Lapin, why should he see her alone? D—n Lapin, my lord; why should he look at her alone? Curse Lapin, my lord; why shouldn't she come in here? Your lordship's 'ealth, my lord.’

“‘Do I show her in, gentlemen, or do I not?’ said the voice of Alphonse.

“‘Do you really object, my lord?’ said the manager.

“‘He can't object,’ said Assommant, ‘why can he object? Majority carries the day. We all want her in. Show her in, Alphonse. Your 'ealth, my lord.’

“Alphonse came out, and with an insolent gesture, and a still more insolent look, beckoned me to step forward.

“I can well remember thinking, as I entered the room, what a pity it was that no Hogarth was

there to draw the scene I beheld. Had I not been endowed with the strength of despair, and with the natural firmness of my precocious character, I should of a necessity have turned round and fled. A set of dissolute, half-drunken men, lounging in ungraceful attitudes in a room meretriciously furnished; an atmosphere heavy with tobacco smoke and redolent of the smell of spirits and of wine; coarse faces, lewd pictures, a general extravagance, which seemed to me almost affected. That was what I saw in M. Lapin's room.

"I was greeted by some suppressed chuckles, one or two exclamations of admiration, and a mock bow from a debauched-looking lad. Nobody else moved, and I stood still, certainly perplexed. At last one of the company whispered to a man in a yellow satin dressing-gown and embroidered magenta velvet slippers, and the man in the yellow satin dressing-gown got up and said—

"I am M. Lapin, *ma chère*; did you want to see me?"

"Yes, monsieur," I answered.

"Did you come about an engagement?"

"Yes."

"Have I seen you before?"

"No."

"What kind of a place do you want?"

"As *figurante, soubrette, chorus*."

"Ah, can you dance?"

"Yes."

"The can-can?"

“ ‘What is that?’ ”

“My last question was greeted with a shout of laughter. I noticed, however, that one handsome young gentleman, who sat apart from the others, and who looked rather disgusted at the behaviour of his comrades, did not join in this laugh, otherwise general.

“The silly boy who had made me the mock bow when I entered, and who was then sitting on the table smoking a cigar and drinking brandy, jumped down and said—

“ ‘Don’t you know what the can-can is, miss? What part of the world may you come from? Shall I show you what the can-can is? It’s this sort of game. Look here.’ ”

“He then began to dance in a most extravagant manner, throwing his arms and legs about in every direction. He finished, giddy or drunk, by falling on the floor, where he lay laughing like an idiot, pleased with the applause of his friends.

“ ‘If that is the can-can,’ said I, ‘I do not know it.’ ”

“ ‘Ah, my dear,’ said M. Lapin, ‘polkas and quadrilles are very nice for parties, but on the stage, specially on the Des Chameaux stage, we want something more, more’—

“ ‘Suggestive,’ said somebody.

“ ‘For shame, de Vincourt,’ cried the gentleman I have mentioned as sitting apart. ‘For shame!’ ”

“ ‘Well,’ continued M. Lapin, ‘can you sing?’ ”

“‘Yes.’

“‘What songs do you know? I should like to hear your voice.’

“‘I know “Lucy’s Sorrow,” “The Sailor’s Dream,” “Mother, I am Coming,” “The Malvern Hills,”’ answered I, quoting the name of one or two simple songs of the time.

“M. Lapin smiled; the rest shouted.

“‘Don’t you know “Pim, Pim,” or “La Belle Bohemienne,” or “La Grosse Margotte,” or “Où sont Pantalons?”’ continued the manager.

“‘I have never heard of them.’

“‘Well, will you try one? De Vincourt, will you accompany the lady?’

“‘By Jove, won’t I!’ cried this gentleman; ‘what is it to be?’

“‘Où sont mes pantalons?’” they all cried.

“De Vincourt rushed to the piano, and seating himself, began to play a jingling, loud, and horribly vulgar tune.

“‘These are the words, *ma chère*,’ said the manager, placing the song in my hands. ‘Read the music over first.’

“I took the sheet and looked at it; I had no difficulty in reading the music, it was like all popular tunes—vulgar, a mere unscientific jangle of loud notes. Then I looked at the words—

Où sont mes pantalons, Babette ?
Disait un jour Gustave.

“It was what I had expected—a licentious Parisian music hall song, stupid, not witty, and obscene. This I, a girl of only eighteen, fresh

from the country, was to sing before a half-drunken company of London profligates. When I had read the song, and saw the smirk of prurient anticipation on their faces, my maidenly honour and pride were so revolted that I felt strongly inclined to crumple up the sheet and fling it in the manager's face. Then I remembered poor little Esther crying at home, and reflected, that if I displeased M. Lapin and failed to get employment, how very terrible our position would be; so, with cheeks burning with shame and reluctant lips, I began—

Où sont mes pant-a-lons, Babette,
Où sont mes pant-a-lons, Babette.

“‘Sing up, sing up!’ cried de Vincourt, for I felt ashamed to sing such a song and sang very low.

“‘Sing up, sing up!’ cried the company.

“I sang the filthy nonsense a little louder, but came suddenly to a stop. I could *not* sing those words before those men. I looked round imploringly.

“‘Sing up, sing up!’

“‘Où sont’”—

“‘Sing up, sing up! (she's got no *chien*). Sing up, sing up!’

“‘What *blackguards* you all are,’ cried the gentleman starting to his feet. ‘It is no use talking to you of shame, you’ve forgotten that word long ago. I won’t stop here and see that girl insulted. Can’t you tell a blush when you see

it? Cannot you distinguish a decent woman from your set?’

“And so saying he walked up to me and tore the sheet from my hand, crumpled it up and threw it into a corner.

“‘M. Lapin,’ continued he, ‘why can’t you tell the girl at once that she won’t do for you? You saw that the moment she entered; you saw her colour was a blush, not *rouge*; you saw tears in her eyes, not belladonna. Why could not you let her go at once instead of allowing her to be insulted by these fellows? It’s not manly, it’s not honourable, or, if those words convey no meaning to you, it is what I will not permit; I will not see an innocent girl, above all, a beautiful girl like this, insulted to excite your dirty imaginations. Go,’ said he to me, ‘this is not the place for you, child. They are only making a fool of you and pigs of themselves.’

“All was over, then; there was to be no supper for Esther that night, and on the morrow night neither supper nor bed. Although very grateful to the gentleman for his interference and for having been spared from singing that song, I felt almost vexed with him now that all hope of securing an engagement was gone and starvation looked me in the face. I burst into tears.

“‘There, there,’ said the gentleman kindly, ‘don’t cry, child. I will see you are not annoyed. You had better go home, you are not the kind of girl they want here.’

“‘I—I must find something to do,’ I answered

between my sobs. 'I—I have a little sister at home and no'—

“‘Where do you live?’ he whispered.

“‘Folgate Mews, No. 17.’

“‘Well, well, go home, go home, I’ll see if I can find something for you to do.’

“‘Thank you, sir,’ and with a look of gratitude into his handsome eyes, I turned round and hurried into the street.

“I suppose it was by this gentleman’s kind influence that the next day I received a visit from a music hall manager, who, after hearing me sing, engaged me to come and sing two or three sentimental songs every night at the Topsy Elephant Music Hall, Camberwell, at the rate of 35s. a week. I gladly accepted this offer, and made my *debüt* the same night. It was very trying work, and needed all my firmness and all my strength of character, but as it stood between me and suffering for Esther, and as I was at least respectfully treated both by the management and the audience, I was very well content to sacrifice my pride and personal feelings.”

CHAPTER XI.

"POOR MOTHER!"

"I suppose I had sung there a month or more, when an event, which changed all my life thereafter, occurred. One night, I noticed amongst the audience a face which I seemed to recognise, which I had certainly seen before, though I could not, for the life of me, tell where or when. I had sung my first song, and was sitting in the room assigned to the artistes, when one of the waiters brought me in a card. I took it, and was both astonished and frightened to read thereon the name of one of the most *renommé* of English noblemen

THE EARL OF BROOKSHIRE.

" 'Who gave you this card?' I asked.

" 'A gentleman in front,' said the waiter.

" 'What message did he send with it?'

" 'He told me to take this card to Miss Amoretta'—such was my *nom-de-guerre*, 'and ask you if you would see him.'

" 'I do not know him,' I replied. 'It must be a mistake.'

"The waiter grinned. 'Oh,' said he, 'ladies here, don't want much introduction, 'specially to flash uns like that. What shall I say, miss?'

You'll see him, of course, and you'll give me my hansel, I hope.'

"I tore up the card, and threw the bits in the waiter's face, saying—'There, you insolent fellow, take that for your hansel.'

"He withdrew, crestfallen, leaving me a prey to many disquieting thoughts and a wretched feeling of anxiety.

"I had hardly managed to compose my feelings, and to take the resolution to go on to the stage when I had to sing my second song, when the manager entered, and, with glee on his face, called out to me—

"'I say, Miss Hammerretter, you're in luck. There's a live lord after you. Wants to be introduced to you. A hearl and all!'

"'He will have to have my permission first, Mr. Mackerim,' said I; 'and that permission I withhold.'

"'Where-fore now, I say?'

"'Because I am not yet in a position to enter into such society.'

"'Bor! but that's a good un!'

"'Good or not, I refuse to see him.'

"'No, yer don't.'

"'I tell you I do; I will not, will not, see him!'

"'Yes, yer will!'

"'You cannot compel me; we have no such clause in our agreement.'

"'Well, Miss Hammerretter, y'ar a soft un. It's not many Helephant girls gets a hearl after them; and there's not many Helephant girls but

what would give their 'eads and hears, sheenyongs and all, to have so flash a bloke arter them.'

" 'I do not regulate my conduct by the conduct of the girls here,' I answered. 'Once for all, Mr. Mackerim, I will not see any gentlemen of the audience.'

" 'But surely, Miss Amoretta, you except old friends?' said a gentleman who entered the room at that moment.

" 'I started; it was the gentleman whose face I had seemed to recognize—the gentleman who had taken my part in M. Lapin's room.

" 'Excuse me,' he continued, bowing—'excuse me, I knew that I must have startled you; and yet I so wanted to see you again, that I could not help presenting myself in this most unpolite manner.'

" 'Mr. Mackerim seemed most surprised at my collected manner. Anyone else of his troupe would have nearly sunk into the ground in the presence of a real live lord.

" 'I bowed in return to Lord Brookshire's bow, and said—

" 'I, too, my lord, am glad to see you again. I have many thanks to offer you for interfering on my behalf that day. I have not been accustomed to insult of that kind. Excuse me for refusing to see you. I did not know your name, save by reputation, and—and'—

" 'You were quite right, child,' he answered; 'you have quite confirmed the good opinion I had formed of you. Mr. Mackerim, you will please to retire. I wish to speak to Miss Amoretta alone.'

"‘I prefer that he should remain,’ I said.

"Mr. Mackerim looked at me as much as to say ‘Well, you are a ninny,’ paused, put his hands into his pockets, coughed, whistled, and finally swaggered out of the room.

"‘Why did you want that fellow to stay?’ asked Lord Brookshire.

"‘Because,’ answered I, ‘I do not care to be alone with you here. You must understand my position, my lord,’ I added, almost irritably.

"‘I do,’ he answered. ‘I do, I understand it so far as to see that you are not at all in a right position. You look a mere child by years, and yet you have the character of a woman. You seem to have placed yourself of your own free-will into this life; you seem to know all the temptations, all the wretchedness, all the vulgarity, all the sin, that surrounds you, and yet, buoyed up by some strange excitement, kept up by a wonderful firmness of purpose, or by an extraordinary love of adventure, you brave all these temptations, rise superior to all the folly and vice of the place, merely for the sake of leading a Bohemian life.’

"‘I have graver reasons,’ I answered. ‘I will be frank with you. I have a little sister at home, and she depends on me. I have no friends in London; I am quite alone. I work like this, because I know no other way of living. As for the temptations, I have not yet seen anything very tempting in the oglings of a few badly-dressed shop-boys, or in offers of beer from the menials of this place.’

“‘You are an extraordinary girl, Miss Amoretta,” said Lord Brookshire, with a glance of profound admiration at me; ‘an extraordinary girl. May I ask how old you are?’

“‘Nearly eighteen.’

“‘Only *eighteen*,’ he cried.

“‘Charlotte Corday and Joan of Arc,’ I answered, ‘were women before eighteen.’

“‘But it was love,’ he whispered, ‘that gave the strength of women to these girls. Have you any such incentive?’

“‘You ask me curious questions, my lord,’ I answered. ‘I do not see why I should answer you. Well, yes, I love—my sister.’

“He seemed relieved, and was, I doubt not, going to say something further on this subject, when I was summoned by the call-boy. It was my turn to go on the stage, to sing my second song.

“‘Good night, my lord,’ I said, leaving the room. ‘Many thanks for your interference, and many thanks for coming to see me.’

“He tried to detain me, and said something about waiting for me, and seeing me home in his carriage. I gave no heed to this, and though I did not misinterpret his offer, I contrived not to meet him again that night, but returned home to Folgate Mews immediately after I had sung my second song.”

Mrs. Dixon paused, tired, and looked questioningly at her eldest son. Charles’ behaviour during his mother’s narrative had been rather

strange, for now he would relinquish her hand, and move away from her ; now seize it and press a silent kiss upon it ; now look at her with a glance of admiration, now of pity, now of fearful doubt ; now spring impatiently to his feet and walk about the room ; now bury his face in his hands.

Nobody spoke a word save Herbert, who said—

“ Poor mother ! ” That was all that was said.

CHAPTER XII.

“TRULY AND WELL, TRULY AND WELL.”

PRESENTLY Lady Brookshire resumed her story:—

“Next night Lord Brookshire was not there. I thought that he might come; and though I felt relieved at not seeing him, I still felt rather disappointed. The audience at the Topsy Elephant Music Hall was chiefly composed of shopboys and tradespeople, with one or two exceptions; and it was to me a great pleasure to see amongst them one of the first gentlemen of the kingdom there to see me, and to hear me sing. He was so handsome, so refined, so graceful, that it was a real pleasure to me to look at him, and, though I had avoided him, I dearly longed to speak with him again. It was not so much his nobility that attracted me, for I was very well accustomed to the society of people of rank, and I had met many at my uncle's house; but it was his face, his air, his manner, his *esprit*, and something indefinable in his behaviour that made me wish to see him again.

“Two or three nights passed, and still he did not come; and each night I felt more sorry, for I feared that my abrupt behaviour had offended him and that I might never see him again.

“I felt so dreadfully out of place amongst all the common people I lived with, and was surrounded by, that I often yearned for the society

of refined people; and when I felt that by my conduct I had placed myself beyond the pale of any such society, I, at times, bitterly regretted the step I had taken in leaving my uncle's house. I have not now much time, or much inclination to relate what I suffered, nor to what insults I was exposed; but I will confess that, strong as was my love for adventure, I soon found that *La Vie de Bohême* was not all so attractive as I had fancied, and very ill-suited to so young and sensitive a girl as I was.

“Well, two or three nights passed, and I saw no more of my noble friend, and during that time I had to suffer many taunts from the vulgar women of our troupe, whose jealousy had been awakened, and who now gratified their malice by laughing at the faithlessness of my supposed lover. Strange to say, their inconsiderate pleasantry put strange thoughts into my head. Could this man be indeed a lover? Could I have won his heart? Could my beauty—for I knew myself to be of an exceeding beauty—and my refined manner, have created admiration? Such were the questions that I put to myself when I heard him spoken of as my lover, though, as I knew, in jest. I was but a girl, wildly adventurous, steeped in flighty romance, and I presently began to think that it was not improbable that the Earl of Brookshire had conceived a passion for me. The thought was so delightful, that I nursed it. Had he not asked me if I had not the incentive of love in the life I was leading? Why would he have asked me such a

question had he not feared a rival? Then I began to think whether I could love him too, and I felt that already I was drawn towards him, that he was handsome, and generous, and pleasant, and—well, if I did not love him, why did my heart beat so violently when I thought of him?

“I was in this state of feeling, therefore, when I saw him again. He was sitting in one of the boxes in the hall. I saw him as soon as ever I stepped on to the stage, and very nervous did I become. I could hardly sing the song I had to sing; and, but for my being a favourite with the audience, should have certainly incurred their displeasure. I had my eyes on him the whole time, and I saw, with some grief, that he was drinking hard.

“As soon as I had got somehow through my song, I retreated hastily to the green-room, half-hoping, half-fearing, to find him waiting for me. But my hopes as well as my fears were causeless, for he did not come; and it was only after I had made my third appearance on the stage, and was getting ready to depart, that I met him.

“He accosted me, and bidding me good-evening, asked me in a serious tone of voice whether I could speak to him for a few minutes.

“I was too sensible a girl to be coquettish, and I at once acceded to his request.

“He then said—

“‘Will you tell me the truth about yourself?’

“‘What truth?’ asked I.

“‘Who you are, and what your name is?’

" 'My name is Miss Amoretta; I am a singer at this music-hall.'

" 'Where do you come from?'

" 'Folgate Mews.'

" 'That is for the world. You will be more confiding to me.'

" 'Why should I? You are but of *the world* for me, my lord.'

" 'Not at all,' he answered very seriously. 'I am not at all of the world for you.'

" 'What else can you be, my lord? You have seen me three times—as—well—as what I am.'

" 'As what?'

" 'As a music-hall singer.'

" 'Bah. I have seen you with different eyes than the yelling shop-boys to whom you have been singing. I ask you to tell me who you are?'

" 'I have.'

" 'You have not. Your name is not Amoretta, any more than Montmorency is the name of the painted hag who is yelling indecencies on the stage at this moment.'

" 'My name is Amoretta for the world and for you.'

" 'I ask you once more,' he said, with intense earnestness, 'not to confound me with the world.'

" 'Why?' asked I, with tremulous voice and palpitating bosom.

" 'Because,' he answered, with growing passion, 'because I am interested in you; because I know that you are not of the world in which I see you; because I see that you are of gentle birth and not

an *anonyma* ; because I can see and have seen, that you are as virtuous as you are beautiful ; because I feel interested in you, who so young, so passing fair, so talented, so brave, have, as I believe, forced yourself into this life. Because I have admired you ever since I first saw you. Because I would help you.'

" I answered coldly—

" 'Your lordship's help would not be of great use to me.'

" 'Ah,' he cried, 'You, too, are of the world, and because it has pleased some idle gossip-mongers to bandy my name about, linking it with foul adventuresses, who, side by side with you, have no claim to the name of woman, you, too, look on me as a vulgar profligate, a common *debauchée*, and turn upon me.'

" 'I do not. I know nothing evil of you ; that would make no matter with me. You are a gentleman ; and be you profligate or no profligate, I presume you will always be that.'

" 'What ?'

" 'A gentleman.'

" 'What do you mean ?'

" 'That I do not care whether you be a profligate or not, as little as I care whether the gang of boys who pester me as I leave this hall, and go home, be profligates or not.'

" He stared at me ; then he said—

" 'You are a very strange girl.'

" 'Why,' I cried, 'I am no child. I know exactly what men and women are worth, and I

know my own worth. I know what I am exposed to here. I know the character of the people here, and the general character of the audience. What has that to do with me? I come here to earn my living, and the living of my little sister; I earn it, and that is all. The morality or immorality of others does not interest me—why should it? I have nothing to do with them.'

" 'Now you must tell me who you are.'

" 'Why now more than before?'

" 'Because I am more than ever interested in you.'

" 'Why do you want to know?'

" 'Shall I tell you?'

" 'I ask you.'

" 'Well, listen. I am sick of the world. I am sick of the men and women I meet. I am weary of flattery, of adulation, of false friendship. I am disgusted with the town. I am sated with the subservience paid to my title and to my fortune. I have long wished to get away from this false, tinselly, garrish Inferno. I came to London to look for a wife—nay, do not move away—and have had all female London trotted out before me, but I saw at once that it was only my coronet and my purse that was wanted, and I have the vanity to wish to be loved for myself. I have long looked for a pure, tender, beautiful girl who would love me, and have felt that with her I could be happy. I will be straightforward with you, I think that I have found that woman. I love you.'

"He put out his arms to me. Oh, how hand-

some he looked, and how my head swam, and how my heart beat.

“ ‘Now will you tell me a little about yourself?’ ”

“ ‘My lord, you are joking.’ ”

“ ‘No, child, I am not. I really love you. I feel that with you I could be very happy. I wish to take you away from this odious town, and you and I and the little sister would go together to some pretty cottage in some quiet English village, where we would live all our lives and be very happy together. I love you truly and well.’ ”

“ ‘Truly and Well, Truly and Well.’ ”

* * * * *

CHAPTER XIII.

THREE LITTLE WORDS.

"CONTINUE, madam, if you please," said Charles.

"Mother, go on," said Herbert.

Herbert was sitting at his mother's feet, casting affectionate glances of love and pity at her beautiful, pain-drawn face; Charles, cold, frigid, unpitying, leant against the mantel shelf gnawing his nether lip. Mrs. Dixon, fatigued with much talking, was looking anxiously at her first-born to see what effect her narrative had produced; John Bennett sat at the table taking notes of what she had said, nodding his head from time to time, as who should say, "Yes, yes, that is quite correct; we can corroborate that, m'lud."

Presently Mrs. Dixon began again—

"Well, we were married. At least, I never thought it a real marriage. It did not take place in a church, but before some witnesses. I almost forget what the ceremony was. It took place in Scotland, and Lord Brookshire called it a Scotch marriage. We went to Scotland a few days after he had first spoken of love and went through this ceremony. I entreated Lord Brookshire to marry me in London, but he refused, saying he did not wish to give idle scandal-mongers something to talk about. I was so intoxicated with the delirious

passion of a girl's first love that I hardly heeded what form the marriage took. He assured me that it was legal, and I believed him, or, rather, I thought little about it, so I felt his kisses on my mouth and neck, and his arms about me, and his heart pulsing against mine. We lived together in a beautiful little house in a village near Kirkoswald in Scotland, and never was woman as happy as I was. Oh, how kind he was, how loving, how devoted! Ah me, the walks we took together, the simple rural pleasures we enjoyed, the nectar we drank from each other's lips, the quiet, the peace, the devotion of our lives."

"Under what name did you live thus, madam?" interrupted Mr. Bennett.

"As Mr. and Mrs. St. John."

"Ha," cried Charles, "Mr. Bennett, you have been laughing at me," and angrily he made for the door.

"Stop," cried Mr. Bennett, "do not go. Hear your mother and then hear me."

"As Mr. and Mrs. St. John," continued Mrs. Dixon, pressing her hand to her heart. "He took that name when we took the house; and to me, Bohemian, that I was, this seemed to give an extra charm to the romance of our lives."

"As what did he marry you, mamma?" asked Herbert.

"As the Earl of Brookshire. That took place near the border, in the town of M—. When we came to Kirkoswald and took our cottage he took the name of St. John; I believe I chose it. He

was more precious to me than many saints. Well, there and thus we lived, and with us the little sister. In less than a year my eldest boy was born."

Everybody looked at Charles. He was very pale.

"Another alias," he cried. "Not Charles Hauberk, not even Charles Benson. Now it is Charles St. John, Charles Amoretta, Charles Lovell, Charles Dixon, Charles God knows what. A goodly company, God's truth!"

Nobody made any remark, and Mrs. Dixon continued—

"When Charles was born and I had got over my confinement, Lord Brookshire said that now that we had a son we should no longer live in this way, and took us all away to Appledean Manor. I entered this house as his wife, as the Countess of Brookshire, with my son as Lord Hauberk."

Charles smiled, and walking across the room took a chair and sat down by Mrs. Dixon's side.

"From the very moment I entered Appledean Manor I felt a change had come over Lord Brookshire. Was it that, the first transports over, his passion was cooling down, or that, surrounded by the symbols, portraits, and relics of his ancestors, he began to regret his alliance with a girl whom he had taken from a music hall, I do not know. What I do know is, that my life at the Manor became a very anxious one. The causes of my anxiety were manifold. Firstly, Charles, Lord Brookshire I mean, became very cold towards me, and coldness passing into irritability we had fre-

quent quarrels. Secondly, nobody ever came to the Manor, neither friends nor visitors, not even did the parson ever call on me. Thirdly, though I had been married to him now several months, and had entered his house as his true and lawful wife, none of the servants ever addressed me by my title, nor did my name appear in any of the lists of nobility that are published yearly. So gradually the terrible thought began to weigh on me, that our Scotch marriage was only a farce, that I was only my lord's mistress, and that my baby boy was a mere bastard. As this dreadful misgiving began more and more firmly to occupy my mind the more angry did I become towards my husband. I was a proud girl, and I felt bitterly the position I supposed myself to be in. Being suspicious of Lord Brookshire, and angry with him, I daresay I was no pleasant companion for him, and he frequently left me to go to town, to the town which, as he had once told me, he hated as a garish, false, tinselly Inferno. Strong as had been my suspicions before, they almost received a final confirmation one day when I chanced to read in one of the London papers a short paragraph which spoke of a marriage being on the *tapis* between a certain Earl of B— and the Lady Jocelyn M—, daughter of the Duke of S—.

“My lord was away at the time or I should have gone straight to him and have taxed him with his treachery, the more bitterly because I felt that soon a second innocent child would be born to bear also the shame of its mother.

"Lord Brookshire's behaviour towards me when he returned quite confirmed my suspicions. He was quite a changed man; no longer kind, he wanted at times even in courtesy towards me, and by rude speeches or chilling slights showed me that he looked upon me as one in his way.

"Not only was he unkind to me and to my baby, but also very harsh towards his servants and tenants. Often and often did I intercede for some victim of his evil humours, and as often was I repelled. The final scene of this miserable life we were leading together soon came.

"How well do I recall the day! It was a bleak, cold day of March, and my lord was in the worst of tempers. There occupied one of his farms a deserving, but unfortunate, man named William Carson, who found scant favour in the eyes of Lord Brookshire. It appeared that this unhappy man had for some time past been unable to pay his rent. Times were bad, his wife was ailing, some of his children, too, were sick abed, and all his little capital had gone in coping with these domestic afflictions. Lord Brookshire, however, had no pity on him, and had told me that he meant to enforce an eviction. On the yesterday of the day when our final rupture took place, I had been down to Carson's farm to see these poor people and to comfort the poor wife, who with her dying lips had prayed me to use my influence with their landlord, and to see that she might at least die in the homestead where she had lived and not in the fields or in some ditch. I promised to do

my best, though I well knew how little power I had. Well, on that fatal day I was sitting in my morning-room in the Manor—it was about mid-day, and I had been thinking how best to present my petition for the unhappy family, when I heard Lord Brookshire”—

“Why,” interrupted Charles angrily, “do you always speak of him as ‘my lord,’ or as ‘Lord Brookshire,’ if indeed he was your husband?”

“Hush,” said Mr. Bennett, “listen.”

“Listen, Charles,” said Mrs. Dixon, “listen. When I heard Lord Brookshire’s step I wondered rather, for he had of late quite abandoned me. I lived in my rooms and he in his, and often weeks passed without our seeing each other. My heart beat as the pleasant thought came to me that perhaps he had come to tell me that the old love had been made new again, and that I was still to him what I had been before. But this thought and this hope were but of a moment’s duration. I could hear him speaking in the passage, and to this day I recall his words. He was speaking to the under-steward and I heard him say—

“‘Now you know my orders, James. Carson is to be evicted to-morrow. You are to give the strictest orders to the keepers on the estate to shoot every d—d fox they see. You will see that the traps and spears are laid about in the coverts; I’ll teach the hunt to laugh at my riding again. And if that rascally surveyor comes here again he is to be thrown into the lake. The scoundrels! They would run their filthy railway through my

land, would they? Well, I will see who is master here—I, Earl of Brookshire, or that gang of Birmingham cotton-spinners. But the most important thing, James, is that Carson is to be turned, bag and baggage, out of his farm to-morrow morning. I won't have such men on my place—an idle, good-for-nothing pack of ruffians. Now you know my orders, and take care that you obey them, and to the letter.'

"I heard him stamp his foot; then he entered furiously into my room. My baby was lying in its cradle by my side. He at once began to find fault with me for having the boy with me.

"‘What, Dora,’ he cried, ‘is that boy here? Have I not told you a hundred times that the proper place for children is the nursery? Will you never learn to respect my commands?’

"‘Commands! Charles,’ I retorted, rather indignantly.

"‘Yes, commands,’ he cried.

"I rang the bell and bade the servant remove the baby. Then I went up to him, and timidly laying my hand on his arm said—

"‘Tell me, Charles, you do not really mean to turn poor Carson out to-morrow?’

"‘You heard my orders, I suppose; did you not?’ he answered.

"‘Yes,’ I said pleadingly; ‘but I do not think you can mean what you say. You were angry, Charlie; put out, were you not? Think of the weather, the cold wind, the snow on the ground. You would not abandon homeless to these this

unhappy family, this poor man, the dying wife and all their little children?’

“‘Poor man, Dora!’ he cried. ‘Poor man, if he is indeed poor he has no right to take my farm. He has not paid a farthing rent for two quarters. I don’t believe his wife is dying; those people are always pretending to be ill. As to all their children—why did they have so many if they cannot feed them?’

“‘Oh, Charles,’ I pleaded. ‘No, you do *not* mean it, I know. Listen. I was at Carson’s yesterday, and saw his wife. Poor woman, she is indeed dying.’

“‘You were at Carson’s yesterday?’ he cried.

“‘Yes, Charles.’

“‘Then what the d—l did you mean by going there? Have not I forbidden you that house a hundred times, a thousand times? What business have you to go secretly planning and plotting against me with my tenants? If it is pleasant to you to play the holy Elizabeth I will be your Louis, I warrant you. You disobey me every day.’

“‘My lord?’

“‘Yes,’ he shouted, ‘and remember that I am your lord. You forget yourself. You forget what you were before you came here.’

“‘Oh, no, I do not,’ I answered. ‘You do not let me.’

“‘I say you do,’ he retorted. ‘I won’t be interrupted. I took you from the stage of a common music hall in London. Do you deny it?’

“ ‘Why should I?’

“ ‘Aye, you had better not. You were a common singer; I was a fool and fell in love with you. I took you to Scotland and then I brought you here. I made you mistress of the finest estate in England. I made you everything’—

“ ‘Except your wife,’ I shouted.

“ ‘Oh, fool that I was! Oh madness! for the sake of a moment’s evil temper to use that taunt. It stung him for a moment, but the pain recoiled on to me, and never, while my weary life lasts, will I cease to regret saying those angry words. How many, many times have I struck my lips with all my force for uttering those three words. Three little words, that took but one second in utterance and yet have rendered my whole life one reproach, one regret, one long, unceasing, indefatigable misery. Oh! bitterly, bitterly have I paid for indulging my temper then, this seared heart of mine has bled, if hearts do bleed, till it has become a sapless, bloodless stone. But for those three words, I might have lived with my children together near me, might have enjoyed the sweet delights of motherhood, have spared myself shame and disgrace, and, above all, a million times more important might have spared my dear boy, my first-born son, my Charles, a life of reproach. Oh, Charlie, my son, my eldest, my first-born, do not stand looking at me in angry contempt. If you have suffered, my poor son, be assured that I have suffered more, I know I have suffered more. I know it, for I know that no one, man or woman,

could be tormented in a worse purgatory than I have been. Ah, the sleepless nights I have passed weeping for your orphan youth, weeping to think that all your child years were being spent far from me, your mother, weeping and quivering, as I imagined what insult, what slights you were suffering, shuddering to think that the dear baby lips, I had kissed were formulating curses on me—so horrible a thought that I have prayed that you might have died before you learned to hate me. Oh, the many hours of loneliness, when, thousands of miles away from you, I have stretched out my arms to you, have blown kisses to my lost child with wincing lips, have conjured your dear face up in my mind for a solace, have beaten the breasts that gave suck to you for the foolish heart they covered, the foolish heart that, pulsing with a moment's irritation, made me utter words that were my undoing, and the undoing of you, my son. Nay, Herbert, do not look downcast, you have always been a dear child to me. I have always loved you, you have never, never caused me a sorrow, but you can understand and will understand, that I thought more of the lost one whom I had not, than of you, dear boy, whom I had ! ”

“Dear mother, of course you did. I was not downcast about that. I was thinking how you must have sorrowed. I was thinking that I ought to have shared that sorrow,” said Herbert.

CHAPTER XIV.

“LOOK, WHAT SHE HAS DONE !”

CHARLES did not make any remark. He was deeply touched, yes, even prone to tears, by his mother's passionate outcry, which told him how she had loved him, how she had longed for him, what sorrow had been hers. He felt ashamed as he remembered how he thought of her, what angry thoughts he had harboured against her. He felt very sorry as he watched her beautiful face working with painful excitement, her dear mouth wincing with pain, her luminous, love-animated eyes turning on him with a fervent yet timid expression, as though she feared that all this came too late, that he, who had so long foregone her love, could well forego it now, that, so long abandoned by her, she was but a stranger to him, that the story of her anguish, of her blighted life, blighted by his absence, did not, could not awake, ever so subduedly, an echo in his heart. He felt all this; and there had come to him once or twice, an impulse to rush at her, and clasp her neck, and kiss away her tears and tell her that for that he had been motherless all these years he needed a mother all the more now, to tell her in burning words of love, that she was no stranger to him, but his mother, his own mother; that the past should be of the past, that the dead dumb years were dead

and dumb, and that the future should atone for the past, that for the future they would love each other and be with each other always. But the impulse of his pride was stronger than the impulse of his piety. No. All this was nothing now. She had abandoned him as a baby, as a man he had no need of her. For that she had caused him to suffer shame, he might have forgiven her, but, that as a consequence of this act he had lost the woman he loved, there was no forgiveness. Bereft of her love, he had been bereft of a dearer love. Could her tears atone for the tears of Euphrosyne? Did Euphrosyne pine less because she, whose folly had cast a slur on him, had pined for him too. Did these late words of endearment efface the memory, branded on his heart, of the words of worldliness, spoken by the Baroness, that had put him and his lady asunder. While she had been stretching out her arms for him, while she had been blowing kisses to him, he had been roughly dismissed from arms that were put out to him, from lips straining to mix with his. So he said nothing, but hardened his heart, and clenched his teeth, and listened to her, placid, cold, and immobile.

Mrs. Dixon had looked at him earnestly while she had been speaking of her longing for him, and had sometimes risen to cross the room and take him in her arms, but repelled and disheartened by his cold face, had as often sunk back into her chair to plead her cause the more pitifully, trying to move him, trying to touch his heart. When, exhausted by the emotion of her

sorrowful remembrances, she had paused, her face seemed to express that she felt that she could say nothing more, that she had done her best to win him back, and that, if the recital of the miseries of her life deprived of him could not do this, that nothing would, and that, lost to her so long, he was, now that she had found him, more than ever lost to her. Her look of hopeless despair, her sigh, that seemed the breaking of her heart, the feeble motions of her hands, the tremulous quiver of her wincing frame, her drooping eyes, the palsied nodding of her royal head, the pain-wrung perspiration that oozed out on to her forehead, the smile of welcome and the anticipating kiss-pouting, fading from her blanched lips, as she recognized that her pleading had been in vain, that her recited agony had not interested him as much as the mimic suffering of an actress interests her audience, should have moved sterner hearts than his. No ; immobile, pitiless, he stood, seeing not his mother, but the love-lorn face of the woman whom he had loved and lost, as he had seen it for the last time one dawning night in a white olive grove near the Middle Sea. He had lost Euphrosyne, he had lost Euphrosyne, the tears of strange women were of little import to him.

It was too much. Mrs. Dixon, who had till now borne up against her sorrow with great fortitude, rose, feebly put out her arms to him, and then fell back, fainting, into Herbert's arms.

"Look, what you have done!" cried Herbert.

"Look, what she has done!" said Charles.

CHAPTER XV.

“THAT IS ALL I HAVE TO SAY.”

MRS. DIXON'S weakness did not last long. As soon as she recovered consciousness she started to her feet, and cried—

“Now listen to the rest of my story. It was not all my fault. It is I who have been punished; it is I, who have been rebuffed; it is I, who have suffered injustice.

“Listen, all of you, and you, son of mine, who have refused to comfort me; listen to me, and judge whether I or your father caused what you have suffered.

“When I spoke those angry words Lord Brookshire started, paused, seemed to reflect, smiled as if a happy thought had struck him, and finally said—

“‘Ha! what do you mean by that?’

“‘No,’ I said; ‘no, Charles, I am not blind. I know my position here. Do not think that I am deceived.’

“‘Are you mad, Dora? Are you not known as Lady Brookshire? Is not your son Lord Hauberk?’

“‘Aye,’ cried I, bitterly, for I hardly heeded what I said, so blinded was I with injured pride, suspicion, anxiety, and fear—‘aye, to the servants

and the villagers ; but to whom beyond the limits of our home ? Is it not to discard me some day, when you shall have become sated with me, that you have never taken me to London ; that you married me in a way that was no marriage ; that all this time I have never been allowed to mix in society ; that no one of your class knows of my existence ; that my name and that of my son is ignored and omitted from the list of peers ? ’

“ He answered nothing for some time. I could read what was passing in his mind ; and terrible it was to me to see that I had suggested to him the means he had so long sought for of getting rid of me—that he saw, by confirming my suspicions, of which he had previously never dreamt, he could drive me from his house. He seemed to be congratulating himself on this wonderful piece of good fortune. Here was the excuse ; here was the lie ready-made, invented for him by me, by which he could free himself from me and my son, who stood between him and the Lady Jocelyn. I saw him glance at some family portraits that hung on the wall, as who should say—‘ How often have I reproached myself for sullyng the noble name of my ancestors, by marrying a common music-hall singer.’ All this I read as clearly as I read an open book. Suddenly he turned to me, and said half-apologetically, half jokingly—

“ ‘ Well, Dora, what more could you expect ? You surely never thought that coronets were given away so easily, did you ? You could never imagine

that I, Earl of Brookshire, could really marry you ?’

“Fool, fool that I had been ! The regret that has harassed me all my after years came upon me then. Yes, I had betrayed myself, and he had taken advantage of me. It was too late now, for I had placed the weapon in his hands. Now I began passionately to show the impossibility of what I myself had stated to be fact.

“‘And our marriage in Scotland ?’ I cried.

“‘Was a mere farce,’ he answered ; and from his tone I saw that he knew that he was lying. But it was my folly that had dictated the lie ; I fought on, sick at heart.

“‘And our living together here as man and wife ?’

“‘As you very wisely remarked just now,’ said he, gaining confidence, and using his advantage to the full—‘we only act that charming rôle before the servants and a few dolts of villagers.’

“‘And our son Charles ?’

“‘Not *our* son—*your* son—Master Charles Amoretta ; that was your name, was it not ?’

“Three words ! Three words ! Three little words !

“‘And do you mean what you say ?’

“‘Why,’ cried he, ‘I am only repeating your own words—confirming what you said.’

“‘What I said ?’ I exclaimed ; ‘do you think I ever believed, that I ever could believe, that you could be guilty of such vile treachery ?’

“‘Gad, did you not just accuse me of it ?’

" 'Yes, in jest.'

" 'A curious jest.'

" 'Yes, Charles,' said I, tenderly and pleadingly, 'say it was only a jest. I was foolish, I know ; but this dreadful thought has occupied me a long time. Why did I never accompany you to London? Why do none of your friends, none of your relations, ever come to stay here? Why do not my name and that of Charles, my son, appear in this peerage?'

" 'Read the title !' he said.

" 'Burke's Peerage.'

" 'Aye ; but you overlook the words *Corrected by the Nobility.*'

" 'Angry even to madness with my folly in suggesting these lies to him, angry to madness with him for taking so cruel an advantage, I cried—

" 'Ha ! Then it is you who are the cause of this ? It is you who disown us ?'

" 'He shrugged his shoulders and said—

" 'You *are* the strangest woman I ever met. Did you not, just a minute or two ago, tell me that you knew all this, that you knew your position, the position of your son ?'

" 'I saw that it was no use being violent, and, with a feeling almost akin to despair, I tried to win him back by tenderness.

" 'Charles, do not be so cruel,' I said. 'I spoke foolishly, I know. One sometimes has a strange wanton pleasure in wilfully supposing one's self victim to horrible things ; and, I suppose, I spoke

from this feeling. Of course I do not, I cannot, believe it. I cannot believe that you could live with me so long, and in the end tell me that I am not your wife, and that my son is not your son. Forgive me my folly. I will never give way to my idle fancies again. I will never reproach you any more. No, you love me too well to discard me, do you not? And I know you are proud of our son. How silly we have been.'

"He looked at me a moment with some of his old tenderness. Then his face grew stern again. No; he could not let me go back and undo all I had done for him.

" 'I am sorry to say, Miss Amoretta, that your suspicions have been only too well founded. I will not attempt to palliate my conduct. I can only plead the evil school in which I was trained. I had intended to tell you of the cruel wrong I have done you, this very day. Circumstances have arisen, which render it impossible for us to go on living together. I am very glad to find you so well prepared for my statement. It saves me an enormous amount of trouble, and, I may add, pain.'

" 'For God's sake, Charles,' I cried, throwing myself on my knees before him—'stop this jesting. I have realised the awfulness of the position which, like a foolish, spoilt girl, I arrogated to myself. I promise you faithfully never to accuse you again. Stop, I beseech you; you have punished me enough!'

" 'You do not seem to understand, Dora,' said

he coldly, 'that I am *not* jesting; that the terrible words you spoke in silly accusation of me were not mere idle reproaches, but true, awfully true. I will make what reparation I can. I will settle an income on you and on your son, so that you will be able to live in quiet comfort. I will allow you to take away with you whichever of the horses, furniture, pictures (excepting, of course, the family portraits, which cannot possibly interest you), or plate you may care to take. My only condition is that you at once abandon the name you have been accustomed to bear, and that you'—

"'Furniture! Horses! Plate!' I cried, starting, in furious passion and maddened pride, to my feet. 'An income for myself! Abandon my name—brand myself and my son for the sake of furniture, horses, plate! No, my lord; I will live and die the Countess of Brookshire!'

"'In an asylum or refuge,' he uttered, menacingly.

"'What do you mean?'

"'That if, in spite of my disowning you, you still persist in proclaiming yourself my wife, you will be treated as insane; and that if you refuse my conditions, I will cast you back into the poverty whence I took you!'

"These are the last words I ever heard him speak. I hardly know what I did, as soon as he had uttered this threat and had shown me that indeed all was over, I believe I walked up to him, raised my hand as if to menace him, that then I burst out laughing, and then rushed from the room,

determined never to see him again. I resolved to leave his house that instant, and to take my sister with me. The boy—I would leave him. I hardly know now what were my motives in doing what I have since so bitterly regretted—perhaps in my rage I turned for a moment against *his* offspring.

“In a few hours I had left Appledean Manor, and, with Esther by my side, was once more facing the world, but with no heart this time.

“As my confinement was approaching, I was obliged to settle down somewhere for a short time, and chose Richmond as the place. There Herbert was born. The rest of my history is soon told. I took my little sister and my baby over to America, and went back to my first profession in New York, under my maiden name of Lovell, the name which I also gave to Herbert. After singing in public for some time, I received the attentions of Mr. Dixon, a man of mature age and great wealth, who after a short time married me. The brewer behaved better than the earl. I never heard anything more of Lord Brookshire, except when I read of his death. When my husband died I determined to come back to Europe. I wrote to Herbert, who was staying at Sorrento. He wrote to me, telling me that he had a friend with him, called Charles Hauberk. I little dreamt it was the son I had lost, but fancied it to be the son of Lord Brookshire by the Lady Jocelyn, not that I knew whether Lord Brookshire had ever taken the Lady Jocelyn to wife. I therefore wrote, telling my son to renounce the company of this friend,

who bore the name that my son should have borne. Herbert afterwards wrote to me, saying that Charles Hauberk had left him, and I at once proceeded to Sorrento. At first I forbade Herbert to mention the name of his friend ; but gradually I began to find out who this young man was ; then you, Mr. Bennett, wrote about this affair, and the possibility of removing the disgrace that rested on my children, and that my son was found ; and at once I came here. That is all I have to say."

CHAPTER XVI.

I SHALL MOST CERTAINLY PROSECUTE MY CLAIM.

“As I have already told you, madam,” said Mr. Bennett, “in our previous interview, Lord Brookshire bitterly repented his conduct to you, and he did his best to find you. After searching for you in vain, he became morose and miserable, and then first determined on putting his son out of the house. He told me then that you had been his mistress, and that the boy was only an illegitimate child, and asked me to arrange for its removal from his house. I believed his story, and, in answer to an advertisement, placed Charles with a Mr. John Elphinstone, and gave him at the same time a cheque for £6,000, to be used on the child’s behalf. So you see that from a worldly point of view Lord Brookshire did not act badly, for how many noblemen altogether abandon their natural children. I believe that he did this with the intention of marrying Lady —, but the marriage never took place. I could not understand why it was never consummated, until shortly before my lord died, when he confessed to me that he had strong suspicions that his marriage with Miss Amoretta was a real marriage, and that his son was his son and heir. He bade me clear up the matter for you, and, if possible, do justice to you. I entreated him to make a will, but my

entreaties came too late; he died intestate, nothing was known of the marriage, the earldom became extinct, and all his property, together with his second title, passed to his cousin, Philip Hauberk, who now enjoys them."

"And did you," cried Charles, "do nothing? Had you no voice? Did you put in no claim for me?"

"Certainly, I did my best. Look how I was placed. Your mother had disappeared. You had been placed as an orphan, Charles Benson, with a stranger. Nobody except myself knew of your paternity. The marriage was contracted in Scotland—I did not know where. I did not know before what witnesses. Your father had left no will. It seemed desperate. I had no evidence whatever to support any claim I could have made. I was the only person living who knew that you were your father's lawful son, and, by a singular accident, I was rendered unable to do anything for you. Within four days of my lord's death, I met with an accident which might have killed me. I was driving from the Manor to the Brookshire Arms, when I was thrown out of the trap, and nearly killed. I escaped with a violent fever, which affected my memory and even my intellect for many years. Meanwhile, of course, Lord Hauberk was in possession, and you were growing up as Charles Benson. I had absolutely forgotten all about you and your father; in fact, all the life I had lived before my accident and illness seemed to me a blank. It was not till I saw your face at

the Oxford railway-station that I began to remember anything about you. When I saw you then—you were wrangling with some insolent fellow or other—I seemed to know your face, but who you were I could not recollect. I saw you again at Bletchley, and became more than ever impressed that I had had something to do with you some time. By the time I had reached London, I was certain of it.”

Mr. Bennett then went on to tell them how all the matter had gradually come back to him, and how he had at once set about to fulfil his promise to the dead man, how he had found the place where the questioned marriage had taken place, and the witnesses present thereat, who were still alive and had made formal and legal affidavits as to its legality; how he had consulted the most eminent Scotch counsel as to the validity of such a marriage, and how they had given a decisive opinion as to its absolute legality and validity; how he had managed to hunt up two servants, who had lived at the Manor when Lady Brookshire came there first, who had always known her as the Countess of Brookshire, and finally, how chance had enabled him to bring the whole family together.

“With proofs like these,” he concluded, “we shall have little difficulty in setting all straight, and soon, my dear Charles, I shall not be the only one to congratulate you on your honours.”

“Faugh,” said Charles, “I am no legal scholar myself, but I do see that even with such proofs as

you have, my claim will never be allowed. It is impossible."

"Why?"

"Because," answered Charles, with an angry look at his mother, "because my mother has proved beyond doubt that she knew the marriage to be a fictitious one. No jury would believe your story in face of such evidence as hers."

"How?"

"*She married again whilst Lord Brookshire was alive.* That will prove that she was absolutely certain that she was not his wife. What jury would, in face of that, give me my rights?"

"Yes," said Mr. Bennett, "that is an awkward point, a very awkward point. So I said when I first saw your mother again. Still, in face of such evidence, I do not think there is any chance of failure. It will certainly be very unpleasant to you, madam."

"Why?" said Mrs. Dixon.

"Because, madam, if you want to prove yourself Countess of Brookshire, and your sons Hamberks, you will have to prove your marriage with Mr. Dixon was no marriage, or at least one carried out by mistake."

"What," cried Mrs. Dixon, "must I prove that I deceived my husband?"

"Not your husband. Not your husband," cried Charles.

"That I deceived the best man that ever lived, the man who for so many years treated me with so much love and tenderness and kindness. Shall

I, for the sake of a title which will prove me to be the wife of one whom I despise, bring shame on the memory of the dead?"

"Of course not," cried Herbert; "that would be too bad. Poor old step-father, he would roll in his grave. I would far rather not be an Honourable Herbert Hauberk. Ha, ha! How funny! The Honourable Herbert Hauberk, indeed. Wouldn't they laugh at me in New York?"

Charles looked with intense irritation at his mother and Herbert; and, turning to Mr. Bennett, said—

"You will put this matter into the hands of a solicitor, of course. The sooner the better. Lord Hauberk must be acquainted with my claim without delay."

"Oh, Charles," cried Herbert, springing to his feet, "pause and reflect. Remember our mother."

"You have heard me," said Charles. "Justice shall be done. I have no dear step-father whose memory I need so cherish as to waive my claim. It is all very well for you to talk about being contented with your position. You have had an easy life, and no shame gnawing your heart. I dare say you would prefer remaining as you are. I will not. I have a stain on me which I will wipe out."

"But think, Charles, what shame it will bring on our mother."

"I can't help that," said Charles, impatiently, "and I don't see where the shame lies. She married again under a mistake. She is the Countess of Brookshire; how can she be Mrs. Dixon?"

Whatever inclinations she may have for this Mr. Dixon, however much she may prefer him to the Earl of Brookshire, she must do justice, justice to herself, to her children, and to the relations of this Mr. Dixon."

"What do you say?" asked Mr. Bennett, turning to Mrs. Dixon.

"I don't know what to say," said that lady. "I see now how very foolish I acted in running away; and though I shall never regret it, that I ought not in justice to myself and to my children, to have married"—

"Do not, I beg of you," cried Charles, "talk about having married this man. You have heard from Mr. Bennett that you were truly and legally married to Lord Brookshire. While he lived, therefore, you could not legally marry again. You must see that; it is very unfortunate, and will be very unpleasant, I do not doubt; but surely your own pride, the lavish love you professedly entertain for me, will tell you that you must renounce as a husband this American."

Mrs. Dixon sat in great agitation and evident perplexity. She did not know what to say. She felt that the peace and the quiet that she had so long yearned for were never to be hers. She shuddered to think that all her life, with its strange vagaries and adventures, would have to be exposed to the full light of the day. She knew very well what the world would say of her; that respectability would and could never be hers; that even after all had been explained, after it had been

clearly shown her that she was not to blame, but rather to be pitied, what she had done would be an everlasting stain on her. When she had fled from England she had left, as she thought, all disgrace behind her. With a new name, in a new country, she had found fresh happiness, and that respectability and social standing which all women, even those who in their girlhood have been the wildest and most romantically inclined, yearn after as they grow older. These she now possessed. Her marriage with the wealthy American citizen had cancelled her life of shame with the English *roué*; his death had left her possessed of wealth. A quiet, luxurious life now lay before her; she might be happy, and, above all, respected. She did not wish to prove herself the Countess of Brookshire, since by doing so she would have to prove that her marriage with the man she had so loved, was no marriage, that the dead had been deceived. She did not wish her past life to be raked up, her girlish foolishness to be exposed, the terrible misfortune of her life to be commented upon. The chance of gaining the worldly distinction of a title which she did not covet, and which only awakened in her painful memories of the past, was not, in her mind, at all to be weighed against the inevitable exposure and scandal that a public trial would entail, for were she even successful she would, it is true, be proved to have been the lawful wife of the Earl of Brookshire, but also to have been the unlawful bedfellow of the American brewer; while, if she were unsuo-

cessful, she would have to bear all the shame of her *rapport* with the Earl, and shame her real husband's memory, a memory which she dearly cherished.

In a few words she put this to her sons.

Herbert's answer was short; he said—

“Dear mother, I will not in any way disturb your quiet. I am quite contented. I don't want any title. I see what such a claim would entail on you. Were it to gain a kingdom I would not advance my claim. Be quite easy, dear mother.”

But not so Charles. *He* saw no reason for keeping quiet when honour, absolution from disgrace, wealth, position, and, above all, the hand of Euphrosyne was offered to him. *He* owed no debt of consideration to the widow of the late Surat brewer, no tribute to the memory of the deceased. It was all very well for Herbert to be generous and magnanimous. Herbert was well off, his birth was untarnished, and, from a worldly point of view, had very little to gain by claiming his birthright; he was a younger brother, and beyond gaining the prefix of “honourable,” had nothing to look for. The lady, who sat weeping in the chair, had no doubt a very sensitive nature, very tender feelings, which would be wounded by his action in claiming his name and his inheritance. That was very probable, only her grief would arise from a damaged self-interest. *He* had his own interests to look after. *His* interests were of the greatest importance to himself, and could he possibly, or in reason, be expected to make them secondary to

those of strangers? Strangers? Yes, strangers! But that lady with the imploring look was his mother; that young man, looking with pleasant anticipation for a generous answer on his part, was his brother. Since when? Since an hour or two! That did not make them other than strangers. It was utterly absurd to expect him to give up the choicest guerdons of life to suit them. Would, could a few sentimental phrases, a few stereotyped sentences of thanks, a few hugs from yonder rather *passée* lady, or an unpleasantly warm shake of the rather large and not very aristocratically-formed hand, of that rather plebeian-looking young man, or a vague feeling of having acted well and nobly, counterbalance the loss of his title, of his absolution from the stain of bastardy, of wealth, of the power of benefiting others (O subtle embolism!), of the lady who might become his wife? Certainly not.

In one minute his resolution was formed. Slightly shrugging his shoulders, avoiding the glances of his mother and of Herbert, he turned to Mr. Bennett, and said in a husky, ashamed tone—

“Mr. Bennett, you will kindly put me into communication with a solicitor. I shall most certainly prosecute my claim. Lord Hauberk must be written to at once.”

Mrs. Dixon rose and, without one word, left the room.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DECISION IS POSTPONED.

"OH, CHARLES," cried Herbert, "I would never have thought it of you. Is your mother's name, are your mother's feelings worth nothing to you? You do not, cannot, mean it."

Charles lit a cigarette and said nothing. He felt very uncomfortable. Herbert stood looking at him reproachfully; Mr. Bennett sat at the table with his hands buried in his hair, evidently perplexed.

Charles' cigarette was smoked and he had lit another before anyone spoke.

Herbert, seeing that Charles would not retract, began very earnestly to plead his mother's cause.

"You always professed yourself a Republican, Charlie. You used to say that all crowns should be hammered into gold coin to buy bread for the people. You used to say that you despised titles, that you only wanted to have one offered to you in order to reject it. Come, Charlie, you must remember when you said that if a baronetcy were ever to be offered to you you would tell the Government to keep their red hands off you. You said you only coveted distinction in order to show the world that you despised it. Now here is your chance. You have now a much nobler motive for refusing distinction. Surely our poor mother has

suffered enough ; she should not suffer more. Have pity on her ! Have pity on her ! Let her have a happy old age ; keep disgrace and scandal from her. Let us all live quietly and happily together, happy, loving each other. Oh ! we shall be so happy together. You will be the favourite son. My mother is so proud of you. I saw that. She will love you very much. And I, who was so proud of you as a friend, shall be more proud of you as a brother. Bother titles, honourables and earls and all that nonsense. We are all Republicans, aren't we, Charlie ? We don't care for names, do we ? We want love and affection. They are worth more than all the titles of the world put together. You think so, don't you ? Come, brother, let us go and tell our mother that we are not going to make any fuss about these titles, but will be"—

"Thank you, Herbert," said Charles ; "but you heard me just now. I am not a fool. I don't despise respectability. I am not going to let this pass through my fingers. If Mrs. Dixon prefers to remain Mrs. Dixon to becoming an English countess I cannot help it. I know what I mean to do."

In vain Herbert pleaded, and finally appealed to Mr. Bennett, saying—

"Come, Mr. Bennett, you were a friend of the family ; don't you think that this had better be kept quiet ? Do you think that a title, &c., will compensate for the shame and scandal that a trial—for I presume any claim would meet with violent

opposition from the man in possession—would bring upon our mother? ”

“ Well, my dear Mr. Hauberk,” began Mr. Bennett.

“ Thank you; Mr. Bennett,” said Charles.

“ My dear Mr. Herbert,” continued Mr. Bennett, “ you see it is a very difficult matter, a very delicate matter. Is your mother well off ? ”

“ Very.”

“ Personally, I mean ? ”

“ Yes, I suppose so.”

“ How did she become possessed of this money ? ”

“ Oh, Mr. Dixon, you know, left her his money.”

“ Besides Mr. Dixon’s fortune, has she any money of her own ? ”

“ No, I don’t think so.”

“ Had Mr. Dixon any living relations at the time of his death ? ”

“ Oh yes, a brother, who, I believe, was very vexed at the way in which Mr. Dixon left his property.”

“ Have you any property of your own ? ”

“ Mr. Dixon left me an annuity of £1,000 a year. All my mother’s property will come to me at her death.”

“ So that this £1,000 a year is really all you two have claim to.”

“ I don’t understand.”

“ It is clear enough, Herbert,” cried Charles.

"I see what Mr. Bennett means. You see that Mr. Dixon left his money to his wife."

"Well?"

"And he had no wife."

"How?"

"Our mother was Lord Brookshire's wife when she married him. It was no marriage. She was not his wife. She cannot use this money. It belongs to the brother of Mr. Dixon."

"Ah yes, I see. Well, that does not matter. I am sure my mother will not care. My £1,000 a year would keep us all three."

"No, no," cried Charles; "that is all nonsense. I must do as I said. I am sure I am right in doing so. In justice to myself, in justice to you, in justice to my mother, in justice to my father, to my ancestors, and, above all, in justice to one whom I prize higher than all, I must vindicate my claim. How utterly absurd," he added irritably, "how utterly absurd it is of you, Herbert; I must and will do it."

"Well," said Herbert, "if you must, you must; but I pray you to do nothing hastily. Take a little time; take a week. Promise me that."

"I think, my lord," said Mr. Bennett, "you might agree to that delay. This matter would in any case require time. You can promise the week, can you not?"

Mrs. Dixon had re-entered the room while Herbert was speaking, and she too pleaded Charles to think,

"I know that you will act nobly," she said. "I feel that you will not, that you cannot be willing to hurt your poor mother."

"All right," said Charles, shrugging his shoulders, "I will consider for a week; but I am certain that I shall be of the same opinion then as now."

"Then," said Mr. Bennett, "I will come again in a week. Shall we make these rooms our rendezvous?"

"Whose rooms are they?" said Charles.

"Yours," said Mr. Bennett.

"Mine," cried Charles; "I cannot afford rooms like these."

"I took them for you," said Mr. Bennett. "You will stay here as my guest."

"On condition that I repay you when"—

"Yes," said Mr. Bennett.

This agreed, Mr. Bennett departed. Mrs. Dixon retired, and Herbert went off to Palgrave Square to see Esther. He had spent most of his time there since he had been in London. Their meeting had been a very passionate one, and Herbert was so delighted at seeing her again, that he had forgotten for the time all about Mr. Hiram.

As soon as Charles was left alone he sat down and began to smoke, and so sat he smoking for two or three hours, lost in thought.

Never for a moment did he hesitate; his purpose was fixed. He would claim his title.

Suddenly, as if remembering, he started up,

rang the bell, bade the waiter bring him a telegram form, and sent off the following message to Keswick:—

“FROM CHARLES HAUBERK,
“The Grosvenor Hotel,
“London,
“TO MISS DOROTHY CROSTHWAITE,
“Laburnum Cottage,
“Keswick.

“Am in London. How are you? Am rather more Hauberk than you thought. So there.”

In about three hours a telegram came from Keswick:—

“FROM MARY KENNEDY,
“Laburnum Cottage,
“Keswick,
“TO MR. CHARLES HAUBERK,
“The Grosvenor Hotel,
“London, W.

“DEAR SIR,

“Miss Crosthwaite is very ill. Could you come at once? Wants to see you; very important.”

When Charles had read the telegram his first exclamation was, “Oh, bother!” Then he felt anxious, then bored, finally indifferent. At last he made up his mind to go to Keswick. He could pass the week there, and being away from Herbert and Mrs. Dixon need less fear that they should influence his decision, or bring him to another state of mind.

So ringing the bell again he asked when he could leave for Keswick, and learnt that a train started from Euston at midnight.

"That will suit me very well," said Charles. "I shall take that portmanteau with me. See that a cab is fetched for me in time for that train."

He occupied the time till midnight in writing and reading, but the excitement of the day was strong upon him and he could do little.

Late that evening, as he was rummaging in his pocket for his portfolio, he happened to find the note which had been given him that morning for Mr. Bennett by the stranger who had accosted him outside the hotel.

Enclosing it in another envelope he sent it to Mr. Bennett through the post.

A few hours afterwards he was in the train on his way to the north.

It was very early morning when Charles reached Windermere, and very few people were stirring in the village, over which there hung a heavy mist, which veiled all the beautiful scenery as if nature grudged to the few who were awake so lovely a sight, and would only then unroll the glorious panorama when the number of spectators should have increased. But Charles, tired with his long journey, enervated by the recent excitement which the last events of his life had created in him, and anxious as to the result of his visit, took little heed of the surroundings, and inquired of a porter when the first coach to Keswick started, and being in-

formed that he would have to wait two hours at least, decided on being driven there in a carriage. Whilst this was being got ready for him he paced up and down the platform of the station, occupied with many and various thoughts ; and the first and foremost of these was with what an air of triumph he would tell Dorothy of his new position, and thus stultify all she had said about him, and how he would enjoy her discomfiture at hearing that he had been right all along in calling himself Hauberk, and how wrong she had been in advising him to be humble. Indeed, he felt a spiteful joy in magnifying poor little Dorothy's well-meant counsels into taunts, in order to better enjoy the vindication of his actions. He did not think her very ill, and to tell the truth felt rather a martyr and like one who has done some sacrifice for coming down all the way from London to see her. Miss Kennedy's telegram gave no reasonable cause for alarm, and he never for a moment fancied that anything serious was the matter, or else perhaps his thoughts about the little old lady who had so befriended him and loved him, when all others had left him, might have been less harsh and less vindictive.

The carriage was at last ready, and Charles was soon on his way.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE END OF TENDER WORDS AND FACES.

HE did not much enjoy the beautiful drive through the fresh and exhilarating morning air, or the lovely scenery that he passed through, for he was anticipating the triumph he would have over her, and planning subtle traps and surprises with which to commence the attack.

Little did it interest him, the languid, amorous breasts of Winandermere, the eternal embrace of the twin Langdales, the simple homes of the simple poets, their simpler graves ; little heed did he take of Rydalmere's murmuring monotone, or of the louder melodies of Grasmere, kissing ever and ever its flower-spangled shores ; of lone Helvellyn, frowning as though jealous of the gentle Nereid lying at its feet ; jealous of the bright-plumaged birds that skimmed over her, of the bending trees mirroring their beauty in her eyes and ever wooing her with wanton whispers, jealous and hiding in amber-coloured clouds his swart uncomely head ; little did he heed all these things, for poetry has not any bidding-place in heads tenanted by petty worldly thoughts, in hearts lukewarm.

He did not see, he did not recognise, the flowers that no Coleridge had plucked, the myrtles unheeded by Southey, the bays that Wordsworth had forgotten. He did not see, though prouder of

the title of poet than of any earthly title, what infinite suggestion of limitless passion, of burning desire, of wasting amorousness, lay symbolized in the bosom nature was baring before him. He did not see, dim and horn-eyed as he had become by foolish wrath, what poets the Lakes should breed ; that the usurped title of Lake-poet could and should be wrested from men who had never deserved it ; that this marvellous Mitylene of England, weary of being sung in simple tunes, clamoured for a Sappho, called for who should sing of her, not as a field for botanists or philosophers, but as a Garden of Eros, a Paradise of Houris, called for who should take his eyes from off the ground, forget the celandine and daffodil, and sing in music as melodious as the lapping waves that beat with toying passion against her warm breasts, musical as the breaths of Æolus that fan her burning cheeks, of the masculine mountains, which Dryads, not idiot boys, frequent, of her nymphs, the lakes, restless in the granite couches, tossing with feverish impatience on their beds, waiting, wearied of the affectionate devotional kiss of the sun, of the ceaseless wooing of the rivers, for the silver-belted stars to arise and to come and sleep all night in their bosoms, of her fresh glens of many marvellous trees, fitter trysting-place for Diana and Endymion than any sombre pine-clad mountain of Italy, or any parched olive-grove of Greece, of what time, Endymion being faithless, Diana, all beautifier

imitated Narcissus, and, for a solace, was content to see herself, a mirrored moon, in a hundred lakes, a hundred tarns, a hundred hundred streams ; called for who should show her as a virgin, as yet unwooed, from whose broad flanks a more mystic mythology than that of ancient Rome, or ancient Athens, could be bred ; called expostulating with the many tongues of moaning winds and plaintive waters, of shuddering trees and grumbling mountains, for who should show her waters worthy of a Hero, her glens fit haunts for amorous Fauns and timid Dryads, her mountains ready for the sweetness of Hymettus, the melody of Parnassus, the splendour of Olympus, her nightingales pining for an Itys, her rivers for the fabled honours of Pactolus, her Flora for a Zephyrus, her cattle for a Faustitas, her reeds for a Pan ; called for a second Terpander to add to the lyre her singers had till then so feebly touched, the three strings of Humanity, Sex and Passion—and appease with the melody and music of his newly-fashioned instrument the jarring tumult of revolted monosyllables ; for an Alcaeus to do battle against simple formless poetry, who should not flee and leave, to be hung up by his enemies in the temple of the Minerva of England, his troubadour's apparel ; for a Pittacus of melody to do battle for her against a Phrynon of Vacuity and despatch him with net of Ridicule.

Charles had none of these thoughts, and for any effect that was produced on his mind and senses

by what was around him, might as well have been driving in a four-wheeler through Bayswater. No ; so deadened was he by the stupid purpose and mean thought then besetting him, that, with less soul-expansion than is felt by the dullest artisan from Manchester, or the most *banal* of tourists, he drove on, wrapped in his folly, blind to the piteous face and deaf to the plaintive voice of poor Lakeland, chained with the adamantine chains of Precedent and Prejudice to the Rock of Horn-eyed Blindness and clamouring for another Perseus to free her ; drove on, leaving poor Andromeda to continue her plaint ; drove on, I say, blind, deaf, and dolted till he reached Keswick, which, with its smell of cedarwood and graphite, woke him up at last.

Laburnum Cottage lay a little way out of Keswick, close to the shore of Derwentwater, and thither he directed the driver.

"That is Laburnum Cottage," said the driver, pointing to a little house that stood surrounded by trees on the margin of the lake.

"Very well," said Charles, "stop here, please. You need not drive up to the house ; the lady is ill, and the carriage might disturb her."

He paid the driver, and walked rapidly to the house. As he passed through the gate and walked up the gravel walk that led to the entrance, all his plans for snubbing Dorothy vanished, for the place brought back to his mind memories of the happy two months he had spent here ; how kind

the little old lady had been to him ; how now she was ill, in pain perhaps ; how he had loved her then, and how she had been always kind and gentle to him all the long time of trial and suffering he had undergone.

Glancing up at the windows of Dorothy's bedroom, he saw that the blinds were down, for the early sun was shining brightly. The house was ominously quiet. As he walked up to the door and marked the muffled knocker and the straw strewn in front of the house, he thought of the many times he had run in boisterously, calling to Dorothy to come out on the lake, or to listen to his latest poem, or to come a walk with him, and of how ready she had always been to break her afternoon nap, or to put away her work, or her book, to do the pleasure of her "dear boy." As he thought of this, he wondered why he had never found this stranger in this selfish world, that one who was so different to him in every way should have shown so very large sympathy with him ; was it conceit, self-sufficiency, or indifference that made these sacrifices on the part of this old lady seem to him so much a matter of course ?

He knocked gently at the door, and for some time his knock was left unanswered. He did not like to knock again too soon, for he feared to disturb the patient, and presently the door was opened. The face of the servant was new to him, and he noticed that her eyes were red, as if from crying.

"Can I see Miss Crosthwaite?" he asked.

"I don't know, sir," answered the servant.

"What name, sir?"

"The Earl of—Charles Benson, I mean," said Charles.

No, he would be Charles Benson here. That was Dorothy's name for him, and no pride of his should contradict Dorothy now.

"Oh, it's Mr. Benson," said the servant; "come in, sir. She has been talking of you, sir, a'most all night."

Charles entered.

"Is she very bad?" he asked, pausing at the foot of the stairs.

"Oh, dear me, sir, yes. Oh it's terrible, sir. She's that weak, sir, she can't eat nothing, she can't sleep. It's fairly heart-rending to see her going under like that."

"Going under?" said Charles, "What do you mean?"

"Dying, sir!"

"Dying? Dorothy dying? Dying?"

"Aye, sir, doctor says it's about over wi' her."

Charles caught at the balustrade. He could hardly believe her words, Dorothy dying. The little old lady dying, before ever he had really felt grateful to her for her marvellous, infinite kindness to him; before he had ever really thanked her, before he had proved to her by many deeds of love and by a new life that he was not indifferent to her and to her advice, before he had shown her that he looked on her as his dear friend, and not,

as it must have seemed to her, as a mere convenience. Dorothy dying?

Then there rushed over his mind, with a bitterness of remorse that seemed to lacerate his heart, the remembrance of the many cruel thoughts he had harboured of her, of the many petty grudges he had borne her, of the many unkind letters he had written to her in moments of irritation and petulancy, things which now nothing could undo or unsay. *Dorothy dying? Dorothy dying?*

For two or three minutes he stood thus, vexed with many bitter self-reproaches and feelings of the wildest remorse, pale, trembling, and clinging as if for support to the balustrade of the stairs. Then there came a great yearning, a mighty impulse to him, to rush upstairs and throw himself on his knees before her he had so sinned against, and pray for her pardon.

"Is she in her old bedroom?" he cried at last to the servant, who was standing wiping her eyes in the hall.

"Yes, sir, but I think she is asleep. At least nurse told me so. She got off to sleep this morning about eight o'clock, and may be she's asleep now. You wouldn't disturb her, would you, sir? She wants a bit of rest, poor thing."

Charles crept upstairs, and, gently pushing open the door, walked into Dorothy's bedroom. Death's bony heel crushes all the weeds of conventionality, and in the presence of death, life throws off its fig-leaves, and suffering makes all living things equal and undistinguished.

The room was very dark, and, though it was broad and sunny daylight without, a little night-light, which, like the frail human life it was serving, was flickering in a dying flame, made this darkness only more apparent. Charles, who had had the sun in his eyes so long, was at first unable to distinguish any of the objects in the room, but stood on its threshold with night in his eyes, cold night in his heart.

Overcome by the strong feelings that were agitating him, he forgot what he was doing, and cried half impatiently, half pitying and pitifully—

“Dorothy, where are you?”

“Hush!” said a voice; and the nurse who had attended Dorothy throughout her illness arose, and, coming towards him, repeated her admonition to silence.

“Is she asleep?” said Charles, in a whisper.

“Yes; be very still, she has not closed her eyes all night. She has been fretting herself about someone who has not been kind to her. Shame on him, whoever he be, to cause her trouble now.”

Charles said nothing, but sank into a chair and covered his face with his hands.

The nurse, curious to see who the new comer might be, gently opened one of the shutters and let in a subdued light.

Charles looked up. He found himself sitting at the foot of the bed, facing the sleeper, upon whom his eyes at once turned.

“Is that Dorothy?” he cried in a horror-

stricken whisper, and with a short laugh, which had more bitterness in it, and expressed more grief than manifold lamentations—"Is that Dorothy? No, no, no."

Then his feelings overcame him, and he began to sob so violently that the nurse had to remonstrate with him once more.

Truly, it was a piteous sight. The little form, the slight body, was now so shrunken, that but for the hand and head that appeared above the bed-clothes, one might have supposed that the bed was not occupied, so little indication did the heavy draperies give of anything beneath them. Then the head and face,—how awful, and yet how cruelly grotesque! The head was shorn of all its hair, and covered with a night-cap that seemed much too large, and gave one the idea that the wearer's head too had shrunk with pain. *That Dorothy!* Oh, death, doubly cruel to invest with grotesqueness thy victims. Is the Sardinian laugh so pleasant to thy fleshless ear?

Dorothy never had those wrinkles, and that yellow, parched, cracking skin, those cheeks so sunken that the worm seemed to have already begun its ravages and stripped the skull of its fair panoply. Were those the lips that had so often smiled on him, the dear lips that had so often called him by pleasant names, the dear, kind, good lips that had so often been pressed to his forehead, in a love more lovely than a mother's love; those Dorothy's lips, those fleshless strips of wrinkled skin, that

seem to cling about the teeth like goldbeater's skin to an open wound? Ah, but if she can never again smile on man with her lips, her dear, dear, blue eyes will yet tell their tale of love. Oh horrible! The eyes seemed to have rotted away; and the eyelids, glued together and caving in, seemed to hang over an empty void.

Charles gazed at her with a curiosity that to him seemed the sin that is unpardonable, with a horrible fascination, with a wild wish to burst into shouts of hysterical laughter.

That Doróthy. Oh no! no! no!

* * * * *

"You mustn't take on like that, sir," said the nurse. "You haven't seen many sick folk, I warrant. Bless you, she'll be all right by and bye. Don't disturb her, there's a good gentleman, but let her sleep on till doctor comes. He'll be gaily pleased to see her asleep."

For two hours Charles sat where he was, and those two hours seemed to him the most miserable a man, this side of eternal punishment, could pass. He had seen dying people, it is true; he had seen death in many forms, from the child that drops off in its mother's arms, to the old man that reaches home; he had seen Death placid, Death horrible, Death awful, but never had he seen before Death so cruelly grotesque. He had, it is true, seen Death making ghastly merriment over his cruel work; and once, he well remembered, he had seen in the Morgue at Paris the form of an old man,

who had thrown himself, after spending the proceeds of a hateful and violent robbery in a wild debauch, into the Seine, whose ruddy cheeks and spreading grin of mirth seemed to speak of some honest workman smiling in the fulness of some pleasant dream, as he lay asleep, instead of the eternal nightmare of a cruel robber, an abandoned profligate, a heartless murderer, rotting unclaimed, unheeded, unknown, in the charnel-house of Crime and Folly.

But that illness and approaching death should, could, have wrought so fearful a change in the pleasant face and comely figure of a God-fearing little woman; that nature should have been permitted by the most High God so to distort, and ravage and insult her form and to render it so terribly and fantastically a subject for laughter, seemed to him so impossible, so dreadful, that all the time he sat there, he kept repeating to himself—

“No, no, no; that is *not* Dorothy, that is *not* Dorothy.”

Why of course it is not Dorothy. Dorothy's hand never could have come to be like that, those thin, bony fingers, curled and twisted like snakes in agony, or like the fingers of a man dead of delirium, clutching feverishly the counterpane, which seem to ooze out between them in woolly folds beneath their intense pressure, those were never Dorothy's fingers that she had so often passed through his hair fondly and lovingly, when

he had done or said aught to please her. Then Dorothy's arm was not a jaundiced skin wrapped tightly round a starting bone. He knew that. Had not that arm a hundred times been thrown round his neck? It was never like that. This was a weird dream, one of those terribly vivid dreams, where the sleeper seems to know that he is dreaming, and yet believes what he sees.

But surely no dream was ever so well furnished, or put on its phantasmagoric stage with all its details so painfully exact. The sickly odour of the chamber, the faint perfume of decaying flowers, which had been left as tributes by the friends of the sleeper, had cheered her for a minute, then had been put away and forgotten and had died and not been removed, the vivid aroma of the food of the sick, the vacant smell of boiled milk and arrowroot, the perfume of wine from yonder bottles of wine, which can give no strength now, the oppressive effluvia of medicines, of opiates, the garnered stuffiness of air breathed many times by burning lungs. Truly, for a dream, all the odours of a sick chamber were too correctly imagined.

The sights—yonder bed, with its soiled linen, its untidy curtains, yonder face, head, hand. Yonder attendant, how vivid a dream to show the red eyes, the pale face, the weary, weary look, the anxious glances, so vividly and realistically. The twilight of the room, the crepuscule of a life. Yonder prayer-book open at the service of the last sacrament for the sick, the Bible which speaks in

large type of the Resurrection. Verily the dream is well-equipped.

The sounds: The low ticking of the clock, the suppressed sighs of the nurse, the rustling of the bed as the patient shifts uneasily in her sleep, the harsh, rasping cough that breaks from her now and then, the silence audible at times, the echoes of the busy world without.

Toueh, the tears that drop on the dreamer's hand, the cold clamminess of the dreamer's brow, the agony that seems to hold him locked in a stifling grasp and crush the life out of him, like some foul instrument of torture, the tongue that clings parched to the dry palate of his mouth.

In all the details of sensibility the dream is too correct. It is no dream. That is Dorothy. This is her death room, and remorse comes too late, Death lords it here.

Charles dismissed all his subtle self-deceivings, and saw the worst and faced it, but with less courage than he would have faced all the horrors of a Gehenna.

* * * * *

"Nurse."

"Yes, miss."

"A drink."

"Is she awake?"

"Yes, hush. There, miss."

"Thank you."

"Do you feel better, miss? You have slept a bit."

"Have I been asleep? I thought I had fainted."

"Oh dear me, I thought you were resting."

"I don't feel rested. A drink."

"There, miss."

"Nurse, I must speak to her."

"No, no, sir, keep quiet please. You must not startle her."

"Can I do anything for you, miss?"

"Yes, prop me up a little. My back is very tired with lying down. I want to sit up a little. Another pillow. Oh, thank you."

The nurse arranged the pillows and Dorothy sat up. She was looking straight at Charles, and their eyes met. His heart went well nigh to break, when he saw that she did not recognize him. Then, thinking that that was because he was sitting with his back to the light, he rose.

"Who is that, nurse?"

"I don't know—a visitor; he has been here some time."

"A visitor?"

"Yes, he made a good deal of noise, but he didn't wake you."

"Nurse, read me that letter I asked you to read to me yesterday."

"No, no, miss, it'll only trouble you. It made you cry yesterday. No, let's have something cheerful. No more dumps, Miss Crosthwaite, you are getting well again."

"No, nurse, I want to hear it. It's one of the last my boy wrote to me. Read it."

"Yes, I will. Oh, I wish I had the writer here."

Charles, who when Miss Crosthwaite had noticed his presence in the room, had advanced gently towards the bed, to take her by her hand and, on his knees, beg her pardon, had, when the letter was mentioned, drawn back, and now leant with burning cheeks against the wall.

"I thought you more than a friend, but I find you entertain the same prejudices as the rest of the world.

. . . . I do not think you mean it, but I look on your letter as an insult."

"Poor boy. Ah, the world is cruel, but then his Dorothy never meant to be cruel to him, and what she said she said not as an insult, but because she knew that it would be better for him not to be proud. Go on, nurse."

"No, miss, I really cannot. It's not fit to read to you. Whatever did you keep this here letter for? I would sent it back sharp to that Orberk, and something for hisself and all."

"Ah, Hauberk, Hauberk. He little knew, poor boy, how I longed to call him by that name. What memories that name awoke, but it was better, better, better."

Charles could stand it no longer. He stepped up to the bed, and seizing Dorothy's hand bent over it; and falling on his knees by the bedside, covered her hand with kisses and hot tears, and knelt there, not speaking for the passionate grief that shook him.

When he found utterance, he poured forth a torrent of words of love, grief and remorse.

"Dorothy, Dorothy, why did you ever keep that letter, why do you read it now? I never, never meant to hurt you; I tried to get it back—I did not know you were ill. Why did not you let me know? I would have watched with you always—I would have shown you, what I cannot now, how dearly, dearly I love you. Oh, do not think me ungrateful—I have been a foolish, headstrong boy, I thought you were well and strong. If I had thought you were poorly and ill I would never have been harsh to you. I was a proud fool. Dorothy, dear, dear, kind Dorothy, why did you not let me know you were ill? Oh, don't think, because I never wrote to you that I had forgotten you—no, Dorothy, I have always thought of you, and always loved you; and if I have been a cause of pain to you, I would willingly die now to help you. Oh, it is terrible to find you so ill, it is terrible, terrible. But you will get well again, Dorothy, and"—

"I told you so, sir, you've startled her and now she's fainted. So you are Orbuck; I wish you was *my* boy, I'd teach you manners."

* * * * *

"Dorothy, dear Dorothy, speak to me. Tell me you forgive me."

"Raise my hand, Charlie; there, place it on your head. Your Dorothy is very weak now."

"Tell me you forgive me, oh, tell me that you forgive me. I am on my knees, Dorothy."

"Not on your knees to me, dear boy, not to me,

I am only a poor, weak, sinful little woman, going home, home, ah, home to my dear old father, and to my brothers. Silly boy, do not cry; why forgive you? You never offended me. Tut, child! You didn't write, but I could not expect it and I did not expect it. You were in the world, and courted by it. You are young, clever, full of genius, and—why, I should have been foolish to expect you to be always thinking of me. I have always loved you, dear."

"How could you, when I was such a brute?"

"Oh, I loved you; I loved you for yourself, for your handsome face, your wit, your poetry, and for your bright soul; and then—there is another reason—you won't laugh, will you?"

"Dorothy!"

"Well, it's a silly thing, and might sound funny from a plain, insignificant old maid like me, but the plain old maid was young once, and the young think of love and like to be loved, and think of marriage and husbands. Little Dorothy was very plain, very insignificant, and nobody noticed her. I felt rather hurt, for I was my father's eldest daughter, and, for my dear mother died when I was very young, mistress of my father's house, and so I thought myself rather important, and did not like to be overlooked. Then, other girls round got lovers, plain, simple Dorothy got none; other girls got husbands and happy homes, Dorothy was fast becoming an old maid. The few gentlemen who came to my father's house took no notice of me, hardly spoke to me, and I felt all that very

much. One day a gentleman called, a fine, noble, handsome man, splendidly dressed. Charles, my boy, that man was a nobleman, he was the Earl of Brookshire. He was very kind to me and spoke to me, went a walk with me, and asked me many things, and was so handsome and kind to me that, that—I felt how much I should have liked to be his wife; that was very silly of me, of course, and very presumptuous. Of course so grand a man could never have thought of me, and yet I loved him. Well, Charlie, therefore, when I first saw you, you so reminded me of him that my heart at once opened out to you; I loved you for the memory your bright face awoke in my lone heart; the memory of the foolish love and the foolish hope I had had once, and, when I heard first from you that you were his son, I loved you more and thought that I would be a mother to the son of the man I had so longed to marry. I have been a sad mother to you, dear, but then I have been weak and”—

Charles's sobs were all the answer he gave.

Dorothy, exhausted with the long speech she had made, fell back and began to mutter things incoherent, in which Charles' name and that of her sister could alone be distinguished.

* * * * *

“Doctor, is there no hope?”

“No.”

“Not one? No chance? Dying?”

“Aye, I fear so.”

"You are not going?"

"No; I will stay till the end."

"The end! oh! oh! oh!"

"Dorothy?"

"Dear boy."

"Tell me what must I do; I have had news"—

"Do? Do what is right, and love your Dorothy well. She will watch over you and wait for you. Charles Hauberk, give me your hand. Now keep quiet and sit there. I will hold your hand, and— Go down on your knees, still holding my hand. O God bless my boy; keep him in Thy sight, and— Our Father which art in— Yes, in heaven. Father, I am coming. Good-bye, dear, I am going to your father. He will know it now, and he will not"—

Her poor, little, withered hand tightened over his. Her dim eyes, turned on his, became fixed and rigid. Her lank chin dropped, her haggard head fell back, and this simple little woman, this child in all but years, had left the world.

The day passed, evening came. Night came and still Charles Hauberk knelt there, like a man frozen in his sleep.

CHAPTER XIX.

BIEN N'EST VRAI QUE LE BEAU.

FROM the side of that death-bed, Charles Hauberk rose a changed man. He had at last recognised the miserable frailty of life, the unerring, inevitable stroke of death. In the fervour of his youth, in the warmth of his blood, in the glow of his passion, in the seeming eternity of his strength, he had thought that life was made for enjoyment, and that he lived wisest who lived best. But the sight of the ugly claw of Death, stretched out before his very eyes, to grab a victim in one so very dear to him, had awakened in him a new train of thought, and had given him a new view of life. He saw now that in so brief a sojourn, so limited a span of existence, there were surely better things to be gained than mere enjoyment, and that it was his call, and hence his duty to raise for himself a monument more lasting than bronze, to inscribe his name on the golden roll of illustrious creators of beauty, and not to live a life of nothingness, which the popped sleep that overtakes all men would cover with the greater nothingness of death.

Pleasure palls in the end, ambition can be gratified to the full of its extent, and, gratified, become satiated; the sweet joys of love or the

fierce delirium of lust will some time or another grow cold and dead; vanity can be satiated; hatred hateth not for ever—nothing lasts of human passion, of human feeling, save one thing only, the power of being impressed by beauty.

Beauty is eternal, has been from all time, is, and shall be. Gods rise and fall back into the dust of their ruined temples; dynasties of kings, which for a while seem to be eternal in the splendour of their pomp, the magnificence of their strength, are raised up, live a span, and finally fall unremembered before the eternal principle of change; what in one age were held axioms of science and postulates of learning, in another age are but the subjects of jest and derision. Creeds and kings have passed away, are even now passing, shall pass; whatever in man or God we worship, we worship but for a little while, knowing surely that the time will come when the throne shall be vacant and unregarded, when the altar shall be strewn with ashes and the temple laid low.

But beauty lasts for ever, and from all time has her worship been, is, and shall always be. Her influence is felt not for a little while only, not in some one place only, but for ever and ever, universally.

Those who dwell in the precincts of her temple need not fear that heresy, or regeneration, or rebellion will offend their queen; for as long as the moon rises, as long as the flowers blossom, as long as the form lies hidden in the marble, or the picture in the colour, or the song in the reed, so

long shall she reign, so long shall she be worshipped.

These were the thoughts that came to Charles as he walked one sad evening after the death of Dorothy by the shores of the lake. How pitiful seemed to him all that he had been striving after, all he had longed for, all that he had so earnestly desired all his life-time long.

Strongly did beauty speak to him now, calling him, who had tarried so long among the foolish burghers of the outer world, to come and lie at her feet, to bring his offering, however small, and to be admitted in that garden where the flowers never fade, where the linnet by day and the nightingale by night are never silent, where the lyre is ever attuned, and the wind ever melodious amid the reeds.

Far off he could hear the mugient bittern bumping in the marsh, and in the trees the homeless cuckoo, sad rogue and vagabond, calling for some Bohemian belamour. Around him in the gardens and on the hills he marked the many lights, now red, now white, glinting from the chestnut-trees with their coloured candelabra, the argent and amber azaleas, the rock-ruby rhododendra, the languid laburnums with their many grape-like clusters of golden flowers, the hawthorn, which does for our English woodlands what the gorgeous oleander does for the hillsides of Italy, glowing here and there with a flush of rare and radiant colour, on which the eye, wearied of the many tints and shades of green, rests with pleasure and is re-

lieved; and that tree, very plentiful upon our English hills, that takes its name from the month when the trees do burgeon and all the flowers blossom; in the fields, the buttercups with leaves glossy and glazed like enamel of gold, the querulous, questioning daisies, the somnolent, yellow poppies, the full-throated, purpled pansies, the honey-coloured cowslips, the broad-leaved Bacchus bole, the earnest star-faced narcissi, the anxious marguerites, and that flower which loves her sisters and cannot well live alone, the hyacinth that pales and pines when no other hyacinths grow near to bear her company; and on the lake the nenuphar, or water-lily, sweet bringer of neperthe to those who love too well, with leaves which, as they rise and fall with the undulations of the moving mere, seem for all the world like pulsing hearts; and on the lake, too, the reflected splendours of the sky, aflame with the setting sun, gleaming and dancing with varied lights that looked to him now like vipers of burnished gold gilding over polished porphyry, now like quoits of black iron with rims luminous with red flame skimming over a floor of marvellous mosaic, now like lights dancing in red wine spilt on white marble.

“So hath it been,” he cried, “so shall it always be—beauty, beauty alone is eternal. All else is voiceless, all else is pulseless, all else is but for a season, and dead and dumb for ever after. I have been all wrong, I have been blind, I have not known myself. What is the dirty world to me?”

What to me is its blame? What to me is its applause? What to me its honours? Let them eat and drink; let them fatten on mast and acorns; let them gladden themselves with empty words and empty thoughts; let them tread their barren paths to their barren graves. I give myself to art, I give myself to beauty. I hold higher than any earthly honour, any mundane honour of principedom or duchy, marquisate or earldom, county or baronage, the name of poet. Death, when it comes to me, shall find me doing, not enjoying."

In this state of mind he turned away and retraced his steps to Keswick, where he had taken lodgings. Dorothy was to be buried on the morrow, and he was staying on to pay her the last mournful tribute of friendship.

It would be difficult to analyse the exact effect that the sudden shock of this awful death had had on the young man. For the first day or two he was simply stunned, and walked listlessly about, muttering, "Dorothy is dead." "Poor old Dorothy is dead." "Poor old Dorothy is dead." Then he became more composed, but found that all his ideas had changed. His conduct by the side of Derwentwater has been described; perhaps a deeper feeling than the one he professed underlay his sudden expression of contempt for worldly honours. Perhaps the regret he had felt as he knelt by the side of the little woman who had tried to be a mother to the son of the man

she had loved, had given him a foretaste of what his regret would be if some day he should have to kneel by the death-bed of his own, his real, his corporeal mother, and have to accuse himself that but for him her life too might have been a happier one, and that but for him her dear eyes would have reddened with fewer tears. It was with this awakened feeling of tenderness in his heart towards his mother that he had gone out for his walk, and when the heart is mollified the whole soul is more impressionable.

Whatever the cause might be, he walked home to his lodgings with the firm purpose to respect his mother's feelings, and in her life-time at least to advance no claim, the establishing of which might cause her, who had already so suffered, to suffer more, but to live quietly and retiredly, and to work out the noble thoughts within him, and to live as a creator of beauty should live.

Dorothy's funeral was very simple, and there were but few mourners. Colonel Markham, the Rev. John Troutbeck, and Charles were the only gentlemen present, and Mary Kennedy and two or three other ladies formed with these the whole procession. Charles stayed behind in the churchyard after the service was over, and the thoughts to which the solemn and sad ritual had given birth strengthened him in the resolution he had formed.

When he got back to Laburnum Cottage he heard that Dorothy's will was going to be read,

and partly from curiosity, partly for diversion, he entered the room where this formality was to take place.

Under Dorothy's frugal management the General's £20,000 had increased to £30,000, all well invested in good securities; and all this was left to different poor relations, not one of her many needy cousins being forgotten. Some of the clauses were very funny, for the testatrix frequently added to her legacies pieces of sound advice.

"To Rebecca Hirdon, my cousin, £100. (She had better not travel first-class.)"

"To Jane Bradfield, my cousin, £200. (Late dinners only mean increased expenses.)"

"To Lucy Riggan, my cousin, £500. (Gowns are made cheaper in Keswick than in London.)"

And so on.

One clause, it was last, ran thus—

"To my dear friend, Charles Hauberk Benson, I bequeath £1,000, free of legacy duty. (May it help him to become a very worthy member of society, only he should not smoke so much.)"

Her "dear sister Sabine Hiram" she appointed residuary legatee, making at the same time a few remarks about her brother-in-law, Bartlemy, which were not exactly complimentary, though no doubt shrewd and to the point.

As soon as this was all over, Charles left Kes-

wick, stayed a day or two at Ambleside, and went up to London in time to keep his second interview with his mother and Mr. Bennett.

As soon as he reached London he drove to the Grosvenor Hotel, and once more took possession of the apartments reserved for him there. He reached this hotel on the evening before the day appointed by Mr. Bennett on which he was to give his final decision with reference to his laying claim to the Brookshire title and estates. No sooner had he entered the hotel and enjoyed once more the luxury of adulation paid by the menials to his supposed grandeur, and tasted the practical sweets of worldly wealth, when he began once more to be sorely exercised in his mind as to whether he was not acting very foolishly in renouncing the splendid position and illustrious name that he might secure for himself.

A very trivial circumstance had almost brought him to recant. As he drove up to the door of the Grosvenor, and was calling to a porter to come and take his box off the cab, another carriage, a brougham, adorned as to its panels with the illustrious coat of arms of the Mangles-Peebles-Mangles, surmounted by a baronial coronet, drove up also. In the carriage he saw the portly figure of the brewer, the father of his late friend, who, as he had read in the papers, had just received his peerage patent. Of course, the porter was more inclined to serve a real live lord than any commoner, and hastened to attend to my Lord

Mangles, leaving Charles furious at this neglect. But he had been too deeply impressed by the death of his little friend, he had too fully learnt to appreciate the value of human love, and the nobility of manliness to forget his purpose or alter his determination for the sake of a *pique*.

"By refusing these honours," he said to himself as he walked upstairs to his rooms, "I shall be nobler than he, nobler than yonder man; and Dorothy, poor old Dorothy, will think better of me, better of me."

When he had rested himself a little he wrote to Euphrosyne a final letter—

"Grosvenor Hotel,

"London, W.

"MY VERY DEAR GIRL,—

"I write to you to tell you that I can never prove myself other to your mother, the Baroness, than what she thinks me to be. As to you, I know very well, that that is a matter of very small import, of no significance at all. I shall be detained in London but for a few days longer, and directly that it is possible will come to Florence. I have had much to suffer this last month, perhaps most of all that I was not able to write to you; but very many strange things have come across me, and I have been much perplexed. But, *sposa mia*, I have all this time been buoyed up by a vague feeling of hope, I know not whence arising, that you are true to me in deed as well as in heart, and that you still love me as much as

you told me. You remember, do you not, Euphrosyne, the road to Massa? And I feel certain, I know not how or why, that I shall soon have you for ever my own.

"In a week at the latest I shall be with you. Till then oppose your mother. When I come I will take you away—by force if by no other means. You belong to me. You have given yourself to me. I will have you; no other man, prince or peasant, shall go even near to you. Dishonoured as I am, I shall be honoured in you; poor, I shall be exceeding rich in the possession of my darling; outcast, I shall find a shelter in your arms. Bohemian, I shall find a dear fatherland in your presence.

"What one week ago I telegraphed to you I now repeat; hope and be loyal, Euphrosyne, hope and be loyal.

"Ever yours,

"CHARLES."

This letter cost Charles no little struggle with himself; these words of self-abasement taxed the strength of the noble resolution he had formed, to no small degree. Indeed, he spent upwards of four hours in writing and re-writing this letter, and at least a score of letters of a different tenor were torn up with a hesitating hand. For, though for himself he was willing to forego all the advantages, all the fame, all the enjoyment of the position which was lawfully his, though for the sake of a mother whom he had never known and whom he had scant cause to love, he was willing to do an

act of great and noble gallantry, though ready to bring a sacrifice of unparalleled unselfishness, for the sake of a poor, distressed woman, who had been very cruelly wronged, though for the sake of a principle of the highest nobility, the purest generosity, he had resolved to abandon what he had all his life so eagerly coveted, so passionately, nay even so morbidly longed for, yet, when he reflected that his sacrifice might entail another sacrifice greater than he could bear, the loss of the dear lady who had become part and parcel of his being, he felt indeed how very weak is the flesh; and at times, as he thought of the dreadful loss he might incur, he felt inclined, nay, he even felt it a duty, to change his mind, and, opposing the sorrows of Euphrosyne to the sorrows of his mother, to consider the dear girl whom he loved rather than the mother whom he had never known.

But manliness, and honour, and strength of purpose, and unselfishness, and the true nobility that lay in him, conquered at last, and thus it came that his letter to Euphrosyne contained not the faintest indication of what he really was, but pleaded for plain Charles, what plain Charles had won.

Oh! how he longed to write her a different letter; how he longed to tell her that the world had lied after all, that her mother had been wrong and unjust; that, loaded with wealth, and resplendent with one of the most glorious names of the glorious nobility of England, he came to her always the same lowly admirer, lowly slave, self-

abased before her peerless beauty, her gorgeous worth; that, as the son of a hundred earls, he was still very proud to claim what the pariah had won, and as a man of large fortune saw still greater value in what the beggared outcast had so highly appraised.

It was a terrible temptation, and a mighty struggle in all truth; but Charles Gentleman, conquered over Charles Nobleman, and the letter, as written above, was the one he sent.

Before he went to bed he walked to his window and looked out—it was a starlight night. He stood thus, looking at the heavens for some time in silence, then he spoke, saying—

“Have I done well, Dorothy? Have I done well?”

Charles Gentleman had tears in his eyes when he went to bed.

CHAPTER XX.

A BARTERED HONOUR.

AT noon of the next day Charles was sitting in his drawing-room, awaiting the arrival of Mrs. Dixon and Herbert. He was dressed in mourning, which seemed to render the pallor of his face still more distinct. He was very pale, for he had passed a very bad night, anxious, excited, and too fatigued by mental and bodily strains to sleep.

The first to arrive was Herbert. He came alone.

"Charlie," he cried, "what is the matter? What has happened?"

"What should have happened?"

"You are in mourning!"

"Dorothy, Dorothy Crosthwaite is dead."

"What!" cried Herbert, "not Dorothy, the little old woman who was so kind to you, who rescued my poor darling Esther"—

"Yes; I have just come from her death-bed."

"Poor Charles! I can hardly tell you how startled, how very, very sorry I am. Do you know? I had meant to go to Keswick myself to see the dear old lady, and to thank her for her great goodness to you and to poor, poor Esther."

"She is buried in the Keswick churchyard. If there is any truth in the Christian religion she is being thanked by the angels now," said Charles.

"Tell me, Charles, tell me all about it; how did

she die? Tell me how did she first get to know you? What was she like? It is not curiosity, you know. She was good to you, my brother."

"I can hardly bear to think of her, of her death, I mean, much less to speak of it. Some day, some day I will speak about it. Believe me, Herbert, there are many martyrs who never suffered martyrdom, many saints whom the world never canonizes."

"Yes, yes," said Herbert, "I am certain of it. Never mind talking about Dorothy, then, if you don't like. I heard from Esther how kind she had been to her, and I wanted"—

"Tell me," said Charles. "So you have found Esther again. What was your first meeting like?"

"There was warm love on both sides," said Herbert; "with that any meeting between two persons is pleasant, is it not?"

"Yes, yes, I daresay. Did she explain her eccentric behaviour with that Hiram, or whatever his name was?"

"It was some time before I cared to touch on that subject, but I wanted to know about it, and after we had talked of many things, I said, 'Esther, whatever made you run away with'— She interrupted me before I had done speaking, and passed her hand wearily over her forehead, saying, 'Don't ask me, Herbert; I hardly know. Do you know that I sometimes feel here that I am not quite responsible for all I do. Impulses, impulses drive me to do things, the regret

comes afterwards, but it always comes too late.' When I heard my mother's story, for the first time, I remembered Esther's words 'impulses, impulses.' Have you not, Charlie, felt in yourself how ready you are to act on impulse? I myself have."

"Yes; I never knew why. When I heard Mrs. Dixon's story, I understood that that part of my nature was inherited. I have often thought—so mad have my actions been—that I *am* partly mad, but it seems to me to be a family affliction. Did Mrs. Dixon ever tell you that any of her people—any of the Lovells were—were deranged?"

Herbert laughed. "No-o-o," he said; "it looks rather like it, though—I declare I am the only steady one of the lot. Poor mother, how headstrong she was; then Esther, whatever could have possessed her, and you, Charles, haven't you gadded about?"

"Like a ship without ballast or rudder," said Charles. "Still I make no self-reproaches. Oh, yes, I do, Herbert; there is one thing I want to say"—

"No, no, no," said Herbert; "you shall not say one word about it. You wrote to me afterwards; it is all right. You must not think of it—it is all bygones. We are brothers now."

"Well," said Charles, "it is very generous of you to forget so gross an outrage. I have not forgotten it; I never shall. Well, well, as you wish it, I won't say anything about it. But I

want one question. Did you know at the time that, that we were?"

"Brothers, no; why?"

"You said something I did not understand at the time. You said—don't you remember?—'You have struck your'— What did you mean?"

"I don't know, Charles. I tell you I have forgotten all about it. I did not know that you were my brother then, though I loved you as one. I suppose I was going to say 'your best friend.' Do you think if I had ever even dreamt that we were brothers, that I should not have behaved very differently to you?"

"You behaved very well to me, Herbert, better than I deserved. Hark, I hear someone coming—it is the Countess"—

Herbert went up to his brother, and throwing his arm round his neck, whispered, "No, no, Charles; not the Countess, not Mrs. Dixon, but *our mother, our mother.*"

Mrs. Dixon entered the room. She looked anxiously at Charles; her nervous air and pale face told very distinctly what a week of suspense the last had been; indeed, she had been very very anxious since her last interview. Charles had appeared so utterly indifferent to her sorrow, so careless as to what the consequences of his prosecuting his claim might be to her, so ready, apparently, to dismiss all considerations of sentiment from his counsels, and to merely treat the matter from a purely business point of view, that she felt

that there was abundant cause to fear that she would not be considered, and that the whole of her wretched life, with its fatal ambiguities, would have to be laid bare before the world, thrust cruelly into the pillory of publicity.

To tell the truth, Herbert, too, had been very anxious, for he loved his poor mother so dearly that any sorrow that might threaten her threatened him with a double menace. He had not had the courage to speak to Charles when he first came in; he feared too much to hear a cold, worldly answer. This fear had been gradually dispelled by the unusually kind treatment he had received from his brother, only to grow stronger when he heard Charles speak of his mother as "the Countess."

Even then he did not dare to make a last endeavour to soften Charles' heart, but had merely appealed to him to remember that the lady was their mother.

Charles answered nothing to Herbert's exclamation, but went up to Mrs. Dixon, took her hand, led her to a seat, and seated himself beside her. Herbert stood looking on in anxious silence.

"Tell me," said Charles, "are you my mother, my real, my own mother?"

"Yes, Charles, I am your mother."

Charles said nothing, but took his mother's hand into his, and sat thus in silence for several minutes. At last he spoke.

"Tell me, mother, did you often want me when you were away from me?"

“Every day, every hour, my boy.”

“How did you feel without me?”

“Very lonely, Charles, very, very lonely.”

“Did you want me very much?”

“Yes, yes, very much.”

“Were you pleased when you heard I was found, that you were going to see me?”

“I had not a moment's peace till I did see you.”

Another silence. After awhile Charles spoke again. “Were you very disappointed when you saw me?”

“Charlie?”

“I mean, was I, was I very unkind to you?”

“You did not know me, you know.”

“Are you very glad to have me here sitting by you? Do I not seem strange to you? You must have forgotten me?”

“A mother never forgets her son, dear.”

“Do you love me now?”

“Charlie, why less now than ever? Have I not found you whom I had lost, my eldest, my first-born, my darling boy?”

Her words were eloquent, but more than eloquent were her tears.

“Will you forget that I have been unkind to you, dear mother? Will you kiss me?”

Would she kiss him? Would she kiss him once, twice, ten times, a hundred times. Ah! Charles, do you not feel that if all the gold in the world were minted and coined into sterling currency, not even all that wealth could buy one such kiss?

Would she kiss him? Would she kiss him? Did not she feel, when she held him in her arms, that she cared not whether each kiss was the last, so sweet it seemed, that life could bring her now no greater joy, that death might come and take her away before she awoke and found that the delirious glow of gratified maternity was nothing but a dream? Had not her lips yearned a thousand times to touch his? Had she not kissed the empty air in day-dream, in night-dream, for him and to him? Would she kiss him now when she held him, doubly-found, in her arms?

Herbert looked on with a pleasant, beaming smile on his face.

Charles saw this, and strange to say it irritated him.

He found himself betrayed into what was odious to him—a sentimental scene, a thoroughly bourgeois Porte-St.-Martin pose.

He rose from the sofa and from revelling filiality, and asked Herbert when Mr. Bennett was coming,

“I hear him now,” said Herbert, “dear Charles.”

Curious young man, Charles. These two words of endearment nearly made him change his mind; he felt irritated with his mother and with Herbert. Why, he could by no means explain to himself.

Mr. Bennett entered.

“Good morning, my lord,” he said cheerfully.

Herbert started and looked at Charles. Mrs. Dixon, still overcome with emotion, sat still on the sofa.

Charles had walked to the window and stood

looking out, with his back to the room. He stood thus some time, while Mr. Bennett was exchanging civilities with Mrs. Dixon and Herbert. These mutual salutations did not take long, and silence soon obtained. Charles, however, kept his place at the window with his back to the room, saying nothing. Why did he not speak?

What would he say?

Nobody will ever know, nobody can ever know what passed through his mind as he stood there. The struggle in his mind, now that it had come to the last moment, when he was to speak finally and decisively, was nearly driving him mad. All the bitter past, Euphrosyne, the triumph over the lying world, wealth, honour, fame, acquittal, revenge, love, all clamouring on the one hand, contempt of the world, filial affection, Republicanism, duty, and a vague feeling of what would be truly noble, truly generous, on the other. He felt as if he was paralyzed, as if he *could* not turn round and speak; he felt he ought to have more time; another month, a week, a day, an hour, nay, a few more minutes, before finally settling a matter of such paramount importance.

Why did he not speak? What would he say?

They stood watching him in terrible suspense. Would he never speak?

What was that sentence written in letters of fire on the cloudy London fog outside?

"As the mother of Euphrosyne, daughter of Gille-roy de Bienaimée, I cannot overlook the bar sinister."

Should he prove that she lied? Could he give

up the power of making the proud lady recant, or should he be silent for ever beneath the reproach and venerate the memory of the dead brewer, who had lived so respectable a life, had died so honourable a death?

Who was that man, down there in the street, that the crowd were doing so much obeisance, making so many bows to? Was it not Lord D'hier? Let us see. The Hauberks received their peerage patent from Charles I. ; Lord D'hier signed the roll a month ago; ten months ago nobody knew him. Would not the crowd be a hundred times more polite, more subservient to him—a Hauberk of ultra-Conquest ancestry? It would be pleasant to be bowed to! Pleasant? To be bowed to, and made way for, and looked after, and pointed out as a higher being, by the insolent bourgeois, who till then had passed him as an unclean thing, a pariah, a chance-child, a bastard; who had said “hush” when his name was mentioned, who had pointed him out but as someone to be avoided, or to point an unctuous homily to their children on the deplorability of vice, and the advantages, social and theological, of honest wedlock; who had called him, till then, the son of nobody, or, grosser insult still, the son sprung from the grimy loins of the people.

Filius Nullius. Earl.

Euphrosyne, wife of the son of the people. }

Euphrosyne, Countess, lady of the people. }

Clear off the reproach, and be happy. }

Bear it, and respect Dixon. }

Why did he not speak? What would he say?

What wretched refrain is that that is now ringing in his ears—

J'aim-e mieux ma mère, O gué
J'aim-e mieux ma mère.

Yes, but one lives with one's mother all one's life to love her like that. Anyone can understand a person making a great sacrifice for a mother who has sacrificed all her life in his service—but *rien pour rien*, nothing for nothing.

Mother? Dorothy tried to be a mother. Dorothy dead. Regret. Ah! it is all clear now.

Charles tore himself from the window, and almost jerked himself round. They started to see the pallor and pain on his face. What would he say?

"Mr. Bennett," he said, very deliberately and gravely, "you addressed me as 'my lord' just now. You must never do so again. I am only Charles—Benson, that is all."

He said it, and walked tremblingly to his mother. Kneeling down before her he hid his face in her lap, and said—

"Be happy, dear mother, I have atoned. The past shall be the past."

When he was sufficiently composed he begged them to leave him alone—he was very tired he said, he wanted no thanks. "I am being thanked elsewhere," he said. Would they all come again in a day or two. Yes, the morrow would do; so they left him alone then.

They all went silently from the room. Charles Benson threw himself on the sofa and lay there for a long time; his face was hidden in his hands, his whole body trembled from time to time.

CHAPTER XXI.

A DREAM WHICH WAS NOT ALL A DREAM.

As he lay on the sofa, weary and exhausted, trembling with the reaction from the excitement he had just undergone, many and various were the anxious and perplexing questions and thoughts that occupied his head. Scarcely knowing whether what he had done were matter for self-congratulation or for grudging regret, the probable consequences of his decision alone occupied his thoughts.

Euphrosyne—what would she say? What would she do? Would she be as ready to bring sacrifice as he had been? Would she, the timid girl and affectionate daughter, have the strength, or even the will, to so oppose her mother as to leave her home, and run away with him? Even to him, who was ready to form the wildest plans, to dream of the most imaginary and imaginative undertakings, this project of his seemed too wild, too impossible. And as this forced itself more and more sternly on his mind, the greater did his excitement become, the greater did his sacrifice appear. What was he to do? Was he to put away all the habits, uses, prejudices, and pursuits of his past, forget or destroy all that had gone before, and go away

as Charles Lovell or as Charles Dixon, with his newly-found mother and brother, and live with them on Herbert's annuity of £1,000 a year, a pensioner of that Dixon whose ill-fated uxoriousness had been the indirect means of causing him to lose all the richest prizes of life.

Indeed there seemed very little else for him to do. His means, even when subsidised with Dorothy's generous legacy, were far too small to keep him even in comfort, and he had very little power of self-denial. Silks, cigarettes, perfumes, travels, his tastes for horses and dogs, and other luxuries swallowed up more than his yearly income, leaving no margin for the bread and cheese necessary to this life, and the books necessary to his life. All counted, and barring the very slight probability of getting any further restitution from his guardian, John Luke Elphinstone, all he had to look to was a meagre £150 a year, quite insufficient for his wants. How was he to live on this, and, very much more important question, how was he to keep a wife, and such a wife as Euphrosyne, on such an income? He was far too keenly appreciative of the pleasures of refined life to have any foolish anticipations of the delights to be found in a "love in a cottage" life. When one is very young, and passion is but a sensual dream, there seems a subtle delight in the idea of poverty sweetened by the delirious ecstasies of love; but one soon finds out that passion needs Burgundy, not ginger beer, for its drink, and truffles, not

onions, for its food, and that the dear one we worship would soon bore us in cotton prints.

One thing he was very certain of, and that was that he was not going to take a farthing of Dixon's money. Indeed, he thought that it would be much better for both sides if he saw as little of his mother and brother as possible. Their tastes and his were different. He was a Bohemian, they were settled folk. He was an artist, they were bourgeois. No; it was evident that he must work for his living, but how? So far his poetry had been a failure; he could not see any dollars in that. What he had seen of journalism had disgusted him, though at the time he had been glad to earn 30s. a week by contributing to the *Clapham Mercury*. He foresaw that journalistic writing would inevitably spoil his style, and style was to him the essential of his art. Besides, the few journalists he had met had so set his teeth on edge that he could not bring himself to fancy himself one of them. He well remembered dining with one very celebrated contributor to the press, whom, supposing him to be an artist also, he had consulted on the subject of taste in poetry. The celebrated journalist had shrugged his shoulders. Free Speech on Peckham Rye, and the Outlook in the Sandwich Islands *et similia* were more in his "line" than poickry, but he must say he liked "We are seven," and Macaulay's "Lays of ancient Rome," had never read Shelley, thought Swinburne immoral, K.T.L. So he did not care to

hope for literary fame from a pursuit of the journalistic profession.

His future seemed to him a tangled maze of conflicting purposes and projects.

* * * * *

Charles jumped to his feet, and paced about the room. Then, as was his habit when he felt puzzled, he lit a cigarette, and, returning to the sofa, sat down to smoke it. But one cannot well enjoy the relaxing luxuries of tobacco in an uneasy posture, and so presently he lay once more stretched out on the sofa. Finding that thinking began to bore him, he presently abandoned it, and occupied himself with blowing, or trying to blow, into the air curled kisses of vapoury rings from his cigarette. Soothed by the opiate, tired by the events and excitements of the day, wooed by the luxurious softness of his couch, he began to feel drowsy, drowsy, drowsier, drowsier, and soon was fast asleep.

He had had many strange dreams in his life, but never was dream so strange as the dream that came to him as he lay sleeping on that sofa.

For it seemed to him at first that he was as a pilgrim walking, footsore and weary unto death, through a doleful valley, a troublesome desert, where all was dim and dark, and where biting winds of evil savour buffeted his face and that in his hands was the dust of wasted years and dead days, and round his temples a tight cord that bit as with fire into his head, and that by his side

there was a sort of shadow that kept pace with him with equal steps, but which, unlike other shadows, was not an opaque silhouette of his form, but in the shade of a note of interrogation, an eternal question, a wherefore? a why? a whether? a whence? a doubt of his *raison d'être*.

And that from first wondering at the curious form of this, his shadow, he soon began to be annoyed, perplexed, and startled at its shape, and at its ever following him pertinaciously; that presently this feeling of annoyance grew into fear, and fear into abhorrence, and that, though weary and full of lassitude, he began to run through the gloomy valley, hoping to escape from this terrible companion, but that it was all in vain, for the terrible

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still followed him.

Then he ran on, not straight before him, but through devious ways, trying to avoid the terrible phantom beside him with an incommunicable, indefatigable feeling that he could never do this, but that this fearful, self-accusing, eternal

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would flicker by his side as long as he lived; that, at last, too weary to continue his flight, too disheartened any longer to cope with the haunting ghoul that dogged his steps, he flung himself upon the brown and herbless ground and lay

there in terror ; but that presently there came one who touched his shoulder with a kindly hand, and looking up, he beheld, standing beside him, no longer grim and ungainly, but glorified and effulgent, the form of Dorothy, who spoke to him kindly and bade him arise ; and who, taking him by the hand, led him out of the valley of sorrow and self-reproach into a beautiful garden, where no shadowy phantom by his side did vex him, and looking round, he saw that the shadowy

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had left him ; that he felt that in this garden he would find the one he loved, but stood perplexed, not knowing which path to take, for in front of him there was a path which led through heavy-scented magnolias to a bower of flowering myrtles ; and on the left another path that was fringed with weeping willows, and which led to a grove of burnished laurels that were watered by a stream of flowing tears ; and to the right was a sloping path that wended up a steep incline, through jagged rocks and prickly briars, to a maze of shrubs and flowers, which had all the gleam and glory of gold ; and behind him was another path that sloped downwards, through a double row of sombre Judas trees, into an abyss that he could not fathom, but where all was shrouded in dark, cruel, unsavoury night.

Here he stood hesitating, not knowing which path to take, for he knew that one would lead him to the dear form of his beloved, yet which he could

not tell. And then he took counsel of his guide asking which road he should take. She answered saying—

“The names and the interpretations of the paths are these. The one leading to the fragrance of the flowering myrtle is the path of Passion; the one that leads through weeping willows to the garlanding laurels is the path of Poetry; the steep and perilous incline that brings the wanderer to the golden wealth of the shrubs and flowers is the path of Worldly Success; the gloomy downward slope between the Judas trees is the way of Treachery.”

But still he stood hesitating, and knew not which to choose.

“Euphrosyne! Euphrosyne! Euphrosyne! Where are you?” he cried, for he seemed to feel her presence very nigh unto him.

“I am here, Caro, I am here.”

“Where?” he cried.

“Here, dear one, here by your side.”

He started and woke, and, raising himself on his elbow, looked round. His eyes were heavy with sleep and blinded by the light that streamed in through the window, and he saw nothing.

“How strange a dream!” he said, falling back on the couch. “I thought I heard her voice, I thought I heard her say—‘I am here, dear one, here by your side’—and it was only a dream after all.”

“I am here.”

“What?” he cried, starting to his feet, “that

voice again? What? Euphrosyne? Here? Bianca? It is really you, or am I still dreaming? Speak, speak."

"Yes, *sposo mio*, I am here. Come, that I may kiss you."

In all sooth it was Euphrosyne that stood there by the side of his sofa, and not less surely was that Bianca di Caserta with her. Both were dressed in travelling costumes, and both were radiant with excitement and merry with smiles. Never had Euphrosyne looked so pretty, never so desirable, never so full of love.

Charles, who was still in doubts as to whether he were dreaming or not, had little doubts as to what to do, but, rushing across the room, he caught his darling in his arms, and covered her face and hands with kisses, only pausing now and then to receive in exchange the sweeter tribute of her lips.

When for very satiety he ceased, he walked away a few steps and looked at them. Yes, there they were. It was no dream. That was Euphrosyne, whom he had supposed to be pining in Florence, that was Bianca, her friend.

He had all his life through so little heeded the conventionalities of the world, that there seemed to him nothing very strange or very unnatural in their sudden appearance in his room. All he knew was that he felt very glad, very happy, very, very, thankful at having them so near.

So he did not, as no doubt he should have done, had he been what is known as a well-behaved,

steady, rational young man, pour forth such questions as, "Whatever did you come for? Is it not rash?" &c., &c., but he simply made them sit down, Bianca on a chair, and Euphrosyne by his side on the sofa.

Looking from one to the other, longest at the other, he burst out laughing, saying—

"However did you come here?"

"Straight from Florence!" said Euphrosyne, laughing.

"How long have you been in London?"

"Half an hour," said Bianca.

"However did you find me out?"

"Your telegram, you know," said Euphrosyne, drawing it from her pocket.

"Of course," said Charles. "Well, I suppose you were anxious at not hearing from me, and"—

"Very," said Euphrosyne, and her tone confirmed what she said.

"So you came. Well, darling, it proves what was proven before, that you love me; but the Baroness, is she"—

Euphrosyne looked pleadingly at him as though to deprecate a word of blame, then, turning to Bianca, she said—

"*Sorella mia*, tell him all about it."

Taking Euphrosyne's warm little hand in his, and winding his arm round her waist, Charles also begged Bianca to explain it to him.

"I have not much to tell," said Bianca; "we did not have many adventures on the way, though we *were* stared at a good deal, but nowhere more

than in this hotel when we asked for Mr. Charles Hauberk. The English are a strange people, and though they say their time is money they seem to occupy a good part of it with other people's affairs. Well, Charles, having attacked your *bella patria*, I will tell you what you want to know. You did not write, La Baronessa wanted my brother for a son-in-law, he wanted our darling for his wife, and our darling's money for his creditors. Never was a girl so hemmed in as Euphrosyne. She was formally engaged at a very splendid *fiançailles*, and all Florence congratulated my brother, and wished her happiness. I did not, I knew where her love was, and told Arnolfo so, only he was not noble enough to desist. He was in earnest, and so was poor little Zina. You should have seen how she treated the dress she appeared in that evening."

"What did you do, darling?" said Charles.

"I tore it off and stamped on it. I was engaged to you, you know."

"Dear little Euphrosyne!"

"Well," continued Bianca, "everything was settled. The Baroness would not hear of any delay, there was no delay to be hoped for from my brother. His creditors were too pressing. Now was the time when you should have come—only you did not. Euphrosyne was in despair; you had not answered her last letter"—

"I could not, I could not," cried Charles.

"Of course you could not or you would, I know that," said Euphrosyne.

"No," said Bianca, "we thought that perhaps you had never got it. Euphrosyne did not know where you were, or she would have written to you to come. We waited and waited, and no news came from you; and, well you should have seen our darling pale and pine, as day after day passed and she had not one comfort from you. At last within seven days of the day fixed for her marriage with my brother, on the day when a dressmaker had come to try on her wedding dress, she had an interview with him, and begged him, oh! she did beg him, to have pity on her and to at least delay the marriage. But it was no use; Arnolfo, who formerly was the most generous, the most noble of men, had become so changed with his changing fortunes that I hardly knew him as the man whom I had once so admired, so loved. He kept her to what was fixed, and but for a strange accident this cruel sacrifice would have been consummated, and you would have had no little Euphrosyne to sit by your side. That same night Arnolfo disappeared. Two notes were left at our house saying that business had called him away to Rome, and that the marriage might be deferred. We never found out what the business was, but Arnolfo certainly did keep away, and the day when poor little Euphrosyne was to have been married passed by quietly enough. Meanwhile we had not been idle, and Euphrosyne had made up her mind to do what would free her from her troubles. Of course the darling came to me and told me about it, and equally of course I was only

too glad to help her. She had made up her mind to run away. 'Well,' I said to her, 'I will go with you. Whither?' Whither should it be but to you, whom she loved. She said that you might be poor or ill, and that anyhow you were surely wanting her, and that she would go to England and find you, wherever you might be, and that she was sure that love would help her to find you. She wanted to go the next day, but I dissuaded her, saying that as now the marriage day was postponed she might well wait, seeing that each day might bring news from you. Well, we waited; and at last your telegram did come, and in a few days, on the pretence of a visit to an aunt of mine who lives at Pisa, we left Florence, accompanied by a maid servant"—

"Where is she now?" asked Charles.

"In the hotel, downstairs," said Euphrosyne.

"We came straight to England through Paris, and only arrived in London an hour ago."

"And the Baroness?"

"She will as yet know nothing about it. She fancies us at Pisa. It is only three days since we left her."

"You are all to me, Charles," said Euphrosyne clasping her hands round his neck, "and for you I did this. For you and for myself, for I cannot live without you."

"Darling," cried Charles, pressing her in his arms, "how can I thank you; and you, Bianca, what a friend you have been to me."

"I have my reward," said Bianca with a sad smile, suppressing a sigh.

"Well," said Euphrosyne, passing her fingers through her hair, "and do I find my boy well or unhappy? What grand rooms these are. This does not look like poverty. Do you know, Charles, I had hoped to find you in rags."

"So that you might comfort me, darling. Well, these are sadder than rags," said he, touching his mourning clothes.

"Yes," said Euphrosyne. "I notice them now. Has anything very sad happened?"

"A dear friend has just left me. Oh Euphrosyne, had I been in the most tattered of rags, in the direst misery, your dear presence could not comfort me more than it does now. Oh, you thought rightly, my pretty little Euphrosyne, I was wanting you; I was! I was! I was dreaming of you when you came. I am thinking of you always. I cannot live without you."

"You shall not," said Euphrosyne. "I have come away from my home and from my mother to tell you that you are dearer to me than home, far dearer to me than my mother."

"But, darling," said Charles drawing her closer to his side, "can I, shall I, do you think, make up to you for all that you will lose?"

"I lose nothing," interrupted Euphrosyne, "if I have you."

"Then," said Charles, "will you take me as I am—poor, dishonoured, nameless?"

"Yes."

"Poor?"

"Don't be silly."

"Dishonoured?"

"How dishonoured?"

"Well, you know. Your mother told you it all."

"Yes, yes. You are not dishonoured in my eyes."

"Nameless?"

"Your name is for me Lover. What name is sweeter?"

"But, Euphrosyne, when I tell you that I can never, never clear off the reproach on my name, that I shall always be an unclean thing among men?"

"You silly boy, how dare you talk such nonsense. What do I care for 'men' since I find all, all I want in you."

"Still, Euphrosyne, think that I am worse off in every way than when I first knew you; that I had hope then, but now I know that all that was said of me was truth. Will you ally yourself, your father's name, to such as I? You are an angel, I know, but the angel is a girl, and you do not see things as you will see them ten years hence. Believe me, darling, it is terrible to be proud, and yet to know one's self lower than the hewers of wood and the drawers of water; it is terrible to have good blood in one's veins and yet only to feel it mantling one's cheeks with blushes at one's own position; it would be more than terrible for me, who am pretty well accustomed to

insult by now, to see you, my wife, insulted too. Oh! the scorn of the world is hard to bear, very, very hard to bear."

"Why so abase yourself?" said Euphrosyne. "I tell you I love you, I tell you that I do not care for the world. I tell you that I can see that you are a gentleman; I tell you that I know that you have power in you to make yourself greater than the great. But after all what can I say more than that I love you?"

"Nothing, darling, nothing."

Bianca, who had been sitting looking quietly on while the lovers were speaking, rose, and with her hand pressed against her heart walked to the window and looked out. There were no tears in Bianca's eyes, but a sorrow too strong for tears was in Bianca's heart.

Charles sat still; he was thinking. He was thinking that a still greater sacrifice had to be made, that he could not take advantage of the blind love of the girl to make her his wife without her mother's knowledge. It took him some time and cost him no little struggle to arrive at this decision, but he did arrive at it, and said—

"How long were you to stay at Pisa?"

"A fortnight."

"Do you write much to your mother when you are away from her?"

"No, not often."

"Then she won't have missed you?"

"I do not think so."

"Euphrosyne, do you really love me?"

Euphrosyne answered with a kiss.

"Do you love me enough to do all I wish?"

The same mute answer.

"Then, Euphrosyne, you will go back to Florence with Bianca and the maid; I will come with you. I will go to the Baroness and tell her all about myself, I will tell her how I love you and how you love me; I will tell her that only for the sake of my—no, no, I won't tell her that—but I will make her see that it is wrong, that it is cruel to keep us from each other. I cannot take this advantage of her. You must not do, dearest, what you may regret. You are a dear, dear girl, and what you have done for me is almost too beautiful to think of; but we must go back, Euphrosyne, for your sake, darling, we must go back, and nobody need ever know."

"Since you wish it, Charles. Do I not love you?"

"You do, dear girl. And is Bianca willing?"

"Bianca goes where Euphrosyne goes."

"And do you not think what I suggest will be best?"

"If after it the Baroness refuses to see your nobility she must be blind. Euphrosyne would have married you to-day had you wished it."

"For her sake, for your sake, Bianca, I think it better to go back. I can take my chance."

"We had weighed all the consequences," said Bianca turning round from the window. "We foresaw what they would say, that we were wild, unmaidenly, and so on; but when a girl loves she

is desperate. Yes, perhaps it would be better to go. When shall it be?"

"You must be tired," said Charles, "or I would say at once. It is awkward, I can hardly take rooms for you here. They would talk, the scoundrels; and yet there is a lady here whom I know. No, that would not do, I don't want her advice. I don't want Herbert to beam at them. I do not know what to do or whom to consult."

CHAPTER XXII.

A MOTHER'S SACRIFICE.

"HULLO, Mr. Hauberk," said Mr. Bennett rushing in. "Oh! I beg pardon, I thought you were alone," he added, bowing to the ladies.

"I asked you to come to-morrow," said Charles.

"Yes, yes, my dear sir," said Mr. Bennett. "I know you did, but I have a bit of news for you, or rather, two or three bits for you; and as I thought you would like to hear them at once I dashed off to tell you. But, as I see you are engaged, I will come again, say to-morrow."

"No," said Charles, "no, I may have left London by to-morrow. You had better tell me all now; and, indeed, I am rather glad you have come, I want your advice. Euphrosyne, *il faut que je parle un petit moment à Monsieur, je reviendrai tout à l'heure.*"

With these words he drew Mr. Bennett into the next room and asked him to tell him his news.

"It is short," said Mr. Bennett. "The two scoundrels who attempted to make money out of their knowledge of your rights have been arrested."

"Indeed. Where?"

"Hiram was arrested in Granville, whither he had been traced by a detective from Paris. You remember that note that was given to you by a

stranger at the door of this hotel? Well, that told me that they were on his path. A telegram from Granville to-day tells me that he is arrested."

"And Snorfield, or whatever his name was?"

"Was arrested at Liverpool."

"Well, as long as I am not to be bored with them any longer I am glad of it."

"Yes, but I have a better bit of news."

"What is it?"

"I have had a letter from Lord Hauberk."

"Now, Mr. Bennett, you know that you must not tempt me; I made up my mind and don't want to be unsettled. God knows it was a struggle."

"Yes, it must have been. You acted nobly, sir. Still I suppose you only mean to keep silence as long as Mrs. Dixon lives. There will be no need to forego your rights after that."

"Ah, I did not think of that."

"Well, will you hear this letter?"

"Yes, only my mind is made up."

"Do not think for one instant that I wish to persuade you to alter your opinion. I can appreciate generosity, and I fully understand your motive. Well, it appears that the scoundrel Hiram had an interview with Lord Hauberk, told him of your existence and of your rights, and tried to induce Lord Hauberk to pay him for his silence."

"Indeed."

"Yes, but Lord Hauberk, who is a dried old bookworm, did not enter at all into Hiram's view

of the case, but sent him away without many words. He now writes to me—

“Appledcan.

“DEAR SIR,—

“I have of late had reason to believe that I am not rightfully in possession of this estate and of the title I hold. It appears that my cousin, the late earl, from whom I inherited, was clandestinely married and had issue. Your name has been mentioned to me as the legal representative of the young man, Lord Brookshire’s son. Should his claim be a just one, I have no intention of opposing it. Could you come down to Appledcan at once and tell me all about it?

“Yours,

“HAUBERK (*pro tem.*).”

“Now, sir, I want to know what I am to do?”

Charles hesitated.

“You see,” said Mr. Bennett, “that no opposition will be made when I bring the proofs I possess.”

“I don’t want my mother’s name brought into it,” said Charles. “You heard my promise, did you not?”

“Yes, but still I think that I had better go down. Will you leave it to me? I will promise that your mother shall not be disturbed.”

“How can you effect that?”

“By getting Lord Hauberk to draw up a formal acknowledgment of your right, in the shape of a

will or other legal instrument. You need not use this as long as Mrs. Dixon lives, but after her death you may"—

"Well," said Charles, "I will leave it to you. I have to leave England for a short time. Look here, Mr. Bennett, you have been a good friend. Will you advise me on something?"

"To the best of my ability."

"You saw those two ladies?"

"Yes."

"Well, I am engaged to be married to one of them. You will perhaps understand now why I at first so persisted on my rights. That girl has run away from home, where they were forcing her into a marriage with a man she detests, in order to find me. Of course I cannot take advantage of her blind love for me, and I wish to take her back to Florence. Yes, she came all the way from Florence. They are too tired to return to-night, or I would leave London at once. I want to know where they can go for the night?"

"Oh," said Mr. Bennett, "that is no difficult matter. My friend Mrs. Carter, of Palgrave Square, would make them very comfortable."

"Well," said Charles, "you take it coolly. Are you not surprised?"

"Nothing would surprise me after this morning's experience."

"Could I act otherwise?" said Charles.

"No-o, I suppose not. It was wonderful, after

all you have suffered too. And gad, I see now what made you so terribly in earnest. The lady, oh, oh, oh."

"The lady takes me as I am."

"And she does well. You are a fine fellow, Mr. Charles, a deuced fine fellow. Always count on me as a friend."

"Well, as an act of friendship will you see that these ladies"—

"Yes, certainly."

"I leave London to-morrow. I suppose you are in communication with Mrs. Dixon and my — Mr. Lovell. Would you tell them I am gone for some time. I would really rather not go through a farewell with them. I feel still rather sore, and I have had too many *émotions* lately to care for any more."

"But look here, Mr. Charles. How are your funds? I don't think you can be well off."

"Oh, well enough. I have about £3,000, and a good many thousands in my brains, I hope."

"The Appledean estates are worth at least forty thousand a year."

"I daresay; but for forty times forty thousand a year I would not"—

"Of course not, I was only thinking about something. Look here, Charles, you won't be offended, will you? You can't remain with only £150 a year. That's nonsense."

"I won't touch Dixon's money."

"No, nor do I think your mother will. I wrote to Hezekiah Dixon, the brother of the late Mr.

Dixon, for her, offering to refund all she had inherited, minus of course the annuity of £1,000 which Herbert had left him."

"I am glad of that," said Charles. "Hezekiah Dixon, indeed."

"No," said Mr. Bennett, "I was not thinking of that, when I said that you can't remain as you are. Now, if a couple of thousand would do you any"—

"No," said Charles, "thank you all the same, but I am of a curious nature and hate the golden mediocrity. I would rather be a loafer with £150 a year, than a *bourgeois* kind of fellow with £300 a year. £300 a year means suburban villa residences, the Crystal Palace, &c. No; *aut Cæsar, aut nullus*. Either Monte Christo or Lazarus. I like adventures and lotteries. £300 a year is too definite. You are very kind, but, no, I cannot accept it. Oh, by the way, are these rooms paid for?"

"Yes."

"By whom?"

"By me."

"What was it?"

"Never mind; I took them for a certain purpose. Of course I will pay for them."

"Well, but they must be given up to-morrow. I must not live in rooms like these."

"No, for the present, I suppose not."

"Will you do as I asked you about the ladies?"

"Yes; I will go to Palgrave Square immediately, and see"—

"Hullo, what is that?" cried Charles and Mr. Bennett, simultaneously.

A loud scream had been heard in the next room. Another! and another!

Charles flew to the door and tore it open, rushed in, and suddenly stopped short. He found himself face to face with

MADAME LA BARONNE DE BIENAIMÉE
who was standing, pale and indignant, in the middle of the room. Euphrosyne had rushed to the sofa, where she was lying with her face buried in her hands.

Bianca, with an air of splendid defiance, stood between the furious lady and Charles, as though to shield him and protect him.

They remained thus a little while in perfect silence. At last the storm broke.

"Base! Base! I knew you were," cried the Baroness, "but so vile a traitor never. But what could one expect from such as you? What can honour be but an empty sound to a" . . .

"Hush, hush, madam," cried Bianca.

Charles hung his head; he could find no words. He was thinking how much poor little Euphrosyne must be suffering.

"I will speak," cried the Baroness. "Cur that you are, had you no respect, no regard—but I waste words. The vileness of your birth explains your conduct. I will speak. What can honour be"—

"Hush, I say," cried Bianca. "You shall *not* say it."

"Silence, girl," cried the Baroness. "What can honour be but an empty sound to a BASTARD!"

Charles winced, and looked imploringly at the lady, pointing at the same time to Euphrosyne, as though to deprecate the use of such a word in the girl's presence.

"Ah," cried the Baroness. "You did not consider her when you made your vile plans. Her honour, my honour, the honour of her ancestors was as nothing to you when—but, Bastard! BASTARD! BASTARD!" she shrieked.

"Silence, madam; my son is no bastard. He is better born than anyone. You shall not insult him."

It was Mrs. Dixon who spoke. During the Baroness's last words, the door of the room had been pushed open, and she had entered, pale but imperious.

With a grave and stately walk she crossed the room, walked to the side of her son, put her arm round his neck, kissed him. Then she stepped into the middle of the room and faced the Baroness, with her hand uplifted, commanding silence.

The mothers stood thus for a few minutes confronting each other, both pale as death, but both haughty and imperious.

The Baroness spoke first. Gathering her dress about her with an air of disgust, she moved away a few steps, then she cried—

"And you, woman, who may you be?"

Mrs. Dixon drew herself up to the fulness of

her stately height, tossed her imperial head, and answered slowly, but with authority—

“I? I am a peeress of England. I answer no questions from you.”

“Hush, mother,” said Charles, “not for my sake. Mother, the cup was bitter, but for your sake I would feign drink it to the dregs.”

“No, my son,” said she. “You shall not; I can bring sacrifice too. Come. Your name, madam?”

“La Baronne de Bienaimée,” said the Baroness, almost awed by the authoritative dignity of her questioner.

“Allow me, Madame la Baronne de Bienaimée, to present you to my son, the Right Honourable the Earl of Brookshire, Twelfth Viscount Perifleurs, Ninth Baron Hauberk of Carrickfergus in Ireland, and Hereditary Lord Warden of Leicester Castle.”

As if bowed down by the splendour of these titles, the Baroness made a deep obeisance to Charles, who, hardly knowing what he did, stepped forward and caught her hand and kissed it.

“Come,” said the Countess of Brookshire; “one act of courtesy deserves another. Present your daughter to me.”

The Baroness crossed the room, took Euphrosyne by the hand, led her up to Charles, placed her little hand in his, and said—

“The Earl of Brookshire will do that for me.”

“Mother,” cried Charles, as his eyes filled with

tears, "but no, it is too much, too much. My head swims."

The Countess of Brookshire darted forward, and, catching Euphrosyne in her arms, kissed her, and said—

"You need no introduction, my dear girl. Your bright eyes tell me. You are his wife, and my daughter."

"*Soit,*" said the Baroness.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE LAST.

ABOUT three years after the events related in the last chapter, the following memorandum was put into the hands of Mr. Jonas Hawkrigg, stone-cutter, of Melton Mowbray, one morning, by a servant dressed in the Brookshire livery.

“From Miles Barton, Bailiff, Appledean Hall, to
Mr. Jonas Hawkrigg, Stonecutter, Melton.

“DEAR SIR,

“I am directed by the Earl of Brookshire to ask you to send over one of your men to make a slight alteration in the memorial slab to his lordship’s father, in the Park Church. His lordship wishes this to be done at once. The words

‘Seventh and last Earl of Brookshire’
are to be altered to

‘Seventh Earl of Brookshire.’

Please see to this at once.”

Yes; Mrs. Dixon had proved that she could make a sacrifice too, and for the sake of her son she had put forward her claim. Lord Hauberk had made no opposition, being convinced of the genuineness of the claim, but had retired from Appledean, stipulating merely to be allowed to take away with him from the Hall library the works of the Duc de la Rochefoucauld, in whose

favour he had quite abandoned the lesser Vauven-argues. Charles had had little difficulty in legally establishing himself the heir; and on the very morrow of the day on which he had signed the rolls, and had been congratulated thereon by the Lord Chancellor, he married Euphrosyne, in whom he found all his boyish dreams of happiness realised.

His mother, weary of the world, had retired to a little cottage in a secluded part of the island of her birth, where she lived many years of peace and quiet, in the company of her sister Esther.

Hiram, arrested at Granville, was brought before the Cour d'Assises of that town, convicted of forgery, and condemned to *travaux forcés à perpétuité*—penal servitude for life.

Chizzlem Snorker, arrested in Liverpool for theft and conspiracy, was summarily disposed of for the former offence, no witnesses appearing against him on the latter count. He suffered a few months' imprisonment, performed, as he said, on his head—a figure of speech probably akin to the one known as inverted attraction. He afterwards went to San Francisco, where he disappeared.

Sabine, robbed of her husband, became pious. She wanders forlornly about the Continent from one boarding-house to another. She is a soured old lady, but essentially religious. She anxiously asks every new acquaintance, if ever they have read a book written in King Henry the Fourth's reign—"On Scurvy Leeches, or the Morale Blood

Suckers." On being asked the author's name, she simpers.

The Duke di Caserta was released from the bondage of the Signor Cittadini a few days after the eighth Earl of Brookshire succeeded to his estates, and lived at Genoa on a yearly pension paid him by that nobleman, till he fell in with the widow of an American pork butcher, whose millions gild his ducal coronet with a luminous lustre.

Bianca, poor womanly Bianca, carried the secret of her love to her grave. She lies now in a tomb in the Campo Santo at Florence, and the cyclamen and other wild flowers are sweet above her; perhaps some day—ah, well!

Valentine Pimmins had no reason to regret having written to Mr. Bennett, and his grandmother lacked not in snuff to charm her old age.

Mrs. Martin received the price of many mangles. Jonas Hawkrigg is obeying his lordship's command. Jonas Hawkrigg executes the order in person. No subordinate is worthy of so great a task. Jonas Hawkrigg with his own hands is removing the tablet.

At the church door stands Euphrosyne, Countess of Brookshire; glorious sunlight dances in her hair, in her eyes; very glorious sunlight dances in her heart.

Seventh and last?

Take it out, Jonas Hawkrigg, bear it carefully home, and there deep as chisel can cut, low as file can file, remove those words. Last, indeed, Jonas!

No, not for two generations at any rate, though we cannot promise more at present; but, say, Jonas, your own private opinion as a family man—do you think you will live to see the words, “and last” once more graven on a tablet to the Earls of Brookshire?

Sturdy little Philip is at your knees, Jonas; look at him before you speak—little Philip, Lord Hauberk, just two years old to-day. Well, Jonas, you are heavily burdened—we won’t trouble you with questions now.

Where is Charles to-day?

In a retired corner of the churchyard by the waters of the Derwent, surrounded by the solemn grandeur of the eternal hills, there is, shaded by patriarchal yews and made gay by many flowers, a quiet grave. The stone bears the simple inscription—

DOROTHY.

Visitors often pause and wonder who Dorothy was. Her resting place is so lovingly tended, and made so lovely with flowers, that one might think of some sweet girl who died before she had entered on the sweetness of her life, whom her many lovers cannot forget. And many who knew her not stop gladly here and weep for Dorothy, and bring flowers for Dorothy, and, even when far away feel better for the thought of the holy simple grave of the unknown girl, whose name wakes in their

heart, it may be, some faint imaginings of the goodliness and godliness that might be everywhere if men loved each other, and God were indeed held to be the Good Giver of all things.

To-day, there bend over this grave the forms of three persons—two men and a woman.

“Look, brother,” says Charles, “there is Dorothy Crosthwaite. Sister Mildred, there lies one who old, was as a little child, a loyal, loving, little woman. Herbert, Herbert, only think. She, little Dorothy, loved our father, and only told me when she was dying and begged me not to laugh at her for her presumption. Think of that, Herbert. She tried to be a mother to me, Herbert, for his sake and”—

Mildred took from her bosom a flower, and laid it on Dorothy’s grave, saying—“Sleep well, little mother.” Then she drew her husband’s arm into hers and whispered to him, saying, “Come, Herbert, he will join us presently. Come away now.”

Reverently they passed on.

And long he tarried there, with his head uncovered and with manly tears in his eyes, who had offended and atoned, holding silent commune with his Dorothy. And who shall say that she was not glad of her boy that day?







